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**Black Representation & Racial Consciousness:
An Analysis of the Cuban Education System & Radical Popular Education
in Havana**

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

in

Latin American Studies

by

Cheyenne Jennings

Committee in charge

Professor Christine Hunefeldt, Chair
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Professor K. Wayne Yang

2019

The Thesis of Cheyenne Jennings is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Chair

University of California San Diego
2019

Dedication

To my Mom, Dad, & Kiana,
I love you always
Thank you for always supporting me

Epigraph

“Only by learning to live in harmony with your contradictions can you keep it all afloat.”
- Audre Lorde

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Abstract of the Thesis

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Cheyenne Jennings

Master of Arts in Latin American Studies

University of California San Diego, 2019

Professor Christine Hunefeldt, Chair

This investigation examines the nature of Black representation in the Cuban education system while also exploring how Black exclusion necessitates radical popular education and Black organizing in the municipality of Marianao. The Cuban Revolution drastically improved the quality of life of millions of Cubans by nationalizing the land and universalizing both health care and education. This case study aims to explore the role of the education system in constructing notions of Cubanidad and how African culture exists within Cubanidad. This thesis contrasts both the objectives and structural differences between public education and popular education spaces. This investigation

seeks to answer the following questions: What is the state of Black representation within Cuba's educational system and curriculum? How do implicit ideologies of whiteness continue to otherize and further exclude Black people and other historically marginalized groups? From the perspective of Black activists and organizers from Havana, how do the schools systems address race and national identity? How do the instructional methods of the school systems differ from the instructional methods used in popular education spaces and community schools/ workshops? This project utilized a mixed methods approach that consisted of interviews, archival research, participant observation, and a discourse analysis of curriculum and other educational resources online. Ultimately, this thesis aims to demonstrate how the school systems act a tool of development and modernity that furthers the legacy of colonialism by excluding marginalized voices.

Chapter 1: Introduction

“Lo primero que hay que hacer es descolonizarnos a nosotros mismos. Tenemos que buscar nuevas literaturas y utilizar los paradigmas negros como Césaire, Nelson Mandela, Angela Davis o los paradigmas negros, de mujeres lesbianas, o de grupos feministas que también pueden darnos otra visión. Sobre todo, con estas y con otras miradas podemos saber del poder negro. Eso hace que seamos mas independientes y autónomos. Nuestro proyecto como familia, como vecinos, como un colectivo, nos va a guiar a otro despertar. Es un despertar de un poder para que la comunidad sepa que yo tengo el poder de hacer mi propia estructura, mi propio proyecto, de decir mi palabra, para contar mi historia, porque hasta por las dogmas y las estéticas del arte, la historia, la música, la religión de los negros eran desvaluadas. No era un valor a resaltar las raíces africanas y ahora entonces cuando una persona lo ve de otra conciencia, sabe muy bien que vale mi manera de hablar, vale mi practica religiosa, mi manera de pensar. Escribo desde lo que pienso y como lo pienso desde mi ritmo africano”.

These are the words from the powerful Luisa Herrera. Luisa is an Afro-Cuban woman who is also an artist, a cultural promoter, a popular educator, and a feminist who has dedicated her life and her home to her community. When I first met Luisa she was in the process of transforming her home into an art gallery and a community space to visibilize and promote the art of unrecognized Afro-Cuban artists. The house, located right in the center of a periphery neighborhood of Marianao, a municipality of Havana, Cuba, originally belonged to her parents but as they got older and fell ill it became more difficult for them to maintain the home. Done in the memory of her mom, Luisa decided to repair her home and make it into a space to be collectively utilized by her community, a space where all are welcome.

Luisa has named the house “The Community House” to remind people that it is a shared space that embraces people from all walks of life. With tall ceilings and traditional French doors that stretch from floor to ceiling, The Community House has a calming aura that forces to you come in and admire the beauty of the space. The walls

of the Community House are decorated with African and Afrocentric art, most of which are made by local unrecognized artists. Luisa considers these displays to be a form of visual anthropology that demonstrates the influence of Africa and its evident roots in Cuban culture. As a popular educator, Luisa conducts events and workshops for people of all ages in the community and serves to provide people with the space and the opportunity to create art and deeply reflect, dialogue and analyze their realities in order to promote human rights and combat the oppressive affects of patriarchy, racism, and homophobia. With the support of her partner, Elena, an Afro-Cuban flamenco singer and veterinarian, they work to maintain The Community House so that their home exudes love and an energy that encourages people to be themselves in their purest form. Both Luisa and Elena hope that their mission to be agents of change, transformation, and peace through affirmative practices both visibilize and normalize the homo-parental, or other non-normative, family units but also connect the community with their roots and instill a sense of pride in their African ancestry through art and music.

This is where Popular Education takes place- in the intimate space of someone's home with the intention of facilitating discussion and educating people in a way that formal education isn't able to do. The Community House, as its name indicates, is metaphor both for the healing and reclaiming process that is undergone within its walls. It is within these four walls that Luisa and her community reclaims their knowledge, assert their narratives, and reconfigure the ways in which they perceive their own realities. This experience is shared and this form of instruction is collectively constructed. These spaces allow us to consider the possibility of other forms of

schooling that differ from traditional and institutional education and encourage us to re-evaluate the desired outcomes of each space. This thesis seeks to contrast community based popular education that is predominantly lead by Afro-Cuban woman and other Cuban woman of color with the traditional Cuban education system in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of the ways in which both spaces work to portray, incorporate, and highlight Cuba's unique and complex Black racial identity. This case study took place in Marianao, a municipality that is 15 minutes outside of Havana. The intention of this work is to illustrate the structural differences between the two spaces and their inherent objectives in instruction.

Why do we attend school? What is the general purpose of education? Are we mandated by the state to attend school until a certain age because of the nation's genuine interest in the individual self-fulfillment of its citizens and residents or are we complying with an imposed obligation in order to appease a greater national agenda? Historically, there is a visible trend that expansion in educational systems usually coincides with expanding centralized governments. Education, not only here in the United States but all throughout Latin America, is rooted in the legacy of colonialism and has been utilized as a tool of development. It does not exist in a vacuum. School systems and educational models are intricately connected to each nations dominant political discourse and prevailing economic systems. Whether it be to "tame" and "civilize" the savage indigenous as it was enacted here in the United States, or whether it was to "*castellanizar*" the indigenous populations in Mexico, Guatemala, or Bolivia, school systems have worked to eradicate the remnants of pre-existing, non Eurocentric cultures, under the guise of economic access, opportunity and mobility.

Globally, education systems have acted as hegemonic functions of the state and federal governments that actively works to uphold and replicate oppressive and hierarchical social systems through implementing policies that exacerbate inequalities and widen the achievement gap for historically marginalized groups.

It is under this premise that I cement the groundwork for this thesis which seeks to explore the role of Cuban Education, political discourse surrounding schooling, and the implicit ways in which the school systems otherizes and further excludes Black voices from historical narratives. Additionally, I will explore how this lack of representation has contributed to the general significance and growth of Black organizing efforts in Havana.

I am hesitant to begin my documentation of this social phenomenon with the Cuban Revolution when racial exclusion and Black activism has long existed throughout Cuban history. However, one can not begin to criticize the shortcomings of the contemporary the Cuban school system, without recognizing and thoroughly understanding the profound importance, intentions, and strides of the Cuban Revolution and the long standing impact it has made, not only in terms of domestic efforts to enact equality but supporting international efforts and fights for liberation and human rights.

Historical Background

The Cuban Revolution & Race

The year was 1959 when Fidel Castro with the help of Argentinian revolutionary Ernesto “Che” Guevara overthrew the United States backed dictator, Fulgencio Batista. This is what many believe to be the start of the Cuban Revolution. The objectives of the Revolution were to liberate Cuba from “the economic bondage and political tutelage of

the U.S”(Moore 4). The goal was to create an egalitarian society that worked to improve the quality of life of all Cubans by alleviating and eradicating the social ills created by capitalism. In the beginning years of the Revolution, Fidel Castro was hesitant to establish a baseline political ideology for fear of alienating certain groups from the initiatives of the Revolution. This lack of a political identity also included a deliberate silence on the topic of race.

At the time, many Afro-Cubans had retreated from participating in politics for a number of different reasons. Many were fearful of further disenfranchisement and exclusion which is what they had experienced during the years of The Republic, while others were reluctant to join the a revolution that was seemingly lead by white middle class, particularly one that was looking to overthrow a Black President (Fulgencio Batista)(Moore 5). After much pressure from several prominent Black figures and organizations, Castro eventually spoke out on the race issue. He declared that eliminating racial discrimination and segregation was one of the main priorities of the revolution. Castro made it clear that there was no space in the Revolution for racism and that racism was both inherently anti-Cuban and counter-revolutionary.

Despite a seemingly dedicated rhetoric that stands to oppose racial discrimination, it is argued that the intention of the Revolution did not go far enough. Writers such as Alejandro de la Fuente, in his book *A Nation For All*, recognize that Castro opposed instituting anti-discrimination laws but placed a great deal of emphasis on racial discrimination in the work place and that the most meaningful resolutions to this problem would be to educate the people by campaigning and debating the topic (de la Fuente 263). However, while de la Fuente considers Castro's remarks on racism to

be subversive to traditional racial hierarchies, author Carlos Moore states that Castro's statement "entirely ignored the ethno-political and psycho-cultural ramifications of the Cuban system of white supremacy" (Moore 21). Additionally, he argues that the actions and rhetoric of the Revolution replicate what Sabina Gledhill identifies as a facet of the "Latin model of race relations" which is that racial integration and miscegenation of the races will solve the "black problem". This ideology is indicative of a racial transformation through whitewashing. In other words, "the benevolent paternalism" of this system imposes violent forms of cultural assimilation while reinforcing racial hierarchies and ideas of subordination (356)

In order to quell the backlash of white Cubans on the issue of race, Castro adopted the ideology of the famous revolutionary Jose Marti. In a speech given on March 2, 1959, Fidel quoted Marti by stating "To be Cuban is more than being white, more than being Black, a Cuban is simply someone who belongs to no race in particular"(qtd in. Moore 27). This colorblind approach was a call for Cuban unity and eventually became the basis for what would be the prevailing ideology that was taught in the school systems that were under-going a major transformation.

As the political identity of the Revolution became more evident, the regime eventually adopted a Marxist-Leninist orientation with a strong anti-colonial and anti-imperialist attitude which resulted in the implementation of various reforms that sought to seize the means of production and place them into the hands of the Cuban people. These reforms included the nationalizing of Cuba's land through an Agrarian Reform, improving access by universalizing the health care system and education at all levels, and a number of other redistributive policies that sought to dismantle a capitalistic

system that favored the wealthy at the expense of the poor. Taking on this political identity meant implementing radical changes in an education system that was both ineffectively utilized and failing the Cuban people.

A History of Cuban Education

Part of creating a more humane society means not only instilling a certain set of values in the people but also creating an educated population who can actively participate in society. This was one of the fundamental motivations behind the Cuban Literacy Campaign of 1961, which effectively eradicated illiteracy from the island while teaching campesino communities revolutionary ideals. The Literacy Campaign was a pivotal moment in history because it served as evidence of the capabilities of the Revolution. Some of the main beneficiaries of the campaign were women, farmers, and rural Cubans of African origins, which are groups that have long been excluded from national initiatives and political participation.

In addition to the Literacy Campaign, the Castros completely revamped the educational system. The objective was to create a “New Man” who was not motivated by material incentives and greed but by working toward the collective good. The Castro regime was going to build a new society with a Marxist/ Leninist oriented educational system that incorporated polytechnic and vocational instructional practices while attempting to unite both physical and intellectual labor to demonstrate the value in all jobs. The objective was to build the individual *conciencia* of each citizen. Essentially, the school systems served as a way to unite the Cuban population by constructing a national identity under a socialist ideology.

After the success of the National Literacy Campaign, the task of education system in the 60s was to develop the necessary skills for economic growth and industrialization (Blum 52). During this time period, there was a major shift toward technical and scientific education, not only to make education more practical and pragmatic by linking the factory or field to the classroom, but also by moving away from pre-Revolutionary practices that focused on humanities and social sciences (63). Cuba constructed school cities, boarding schools, schools that specialized in agriculture, and even schools that worked to specifically provide opportunities for women while still incorporating a Revolutionary pedagogy, that promoted the formation of the New and productive man. An example of this Revolutionary pedagogy consisted of teaching students explicitly Marxist ideals through regular educational practices which like teaching the alphabet with Revolutionary symbols like A for Agrarian reform or F for Fusil. However, many teachers were not in favor of this form of indoctrination, causing many to leave in exile and influencing the state to encourage teachers to adopt the passion of Cuba's "political religion", as Denise Blum would call it, or emphasize the heroism and sacrifice of the Revolution (68).

The 1970s were an era in Cuban Educational History that is marked by fluctuations in policy and attempts to materialize the moral and philosophical appeals of "The New Man. While the 60s were a period dedicated to instituting radical changes, the 70s were a time where the government hoped to improve those policies by examining educational data and their outcomes in order to make necessary changes. For example, in 1971, out of all of the school aged children in Cuba (ages 4-16) 300,000 did not study or work, the drop out rate in rural areas was 88% and in urban areas it was

66%. While these are just a few examples of student outcomes, these statistics can also be attributed to the fact that many Cubans material needs were still not met. However, these numbers were the inspiration for El Plan de Perfeccionamiento (The Improvement Plan), which was a major restructuring of policy and curriculum content in the school systems. The Improvement Pan included plans to improve teacher preparation programs, it guaranteed a full year of kindergarten, it incorporated special subjects to various grade levels, and it old revised school materials such as textbooks. It also set out to improve enrollment, student engagement and motivation, and retention while encouraging adult literates from the National Literacy Campaign to continue their education to attain a certificate for full literacy. This was called the Battle for the Sixth grade (Blum 83;Smith 40). Rosi Smith, in her book, *Education, Citizenship, and Cuban Identity*, also claims that the 70s were also a time in which Cuba's economic dependence on the Soviet Union resulted in the state putting into affect a top down structure that was closely aligned to many other communist nations of the Eastern bloc (14). While punitive laws and compulsory policies were put in place as a result of a lack of student motivation, some strides were made and this became evident in the emergence of an over educated population. This resulted in high enrollments in post secondary educational and vocational institutions causing the state to put selective admissions policies in place (Blum 91).

In the 80's, Cuba created the Rectification Process, which sought to readjust economic mechanism that allowed for a heavy reliance on market forces and economic motivations. The Rectification was also a collective initiative to move away from a system that reflected "hierarchism, formalism, and materialism to reinvent an

authentically Cuban socialism”(Smith 15). In terms of education reform, Cuba continued with the efforts of the Improvement Plan which resulted in the introduction of civic education, a general move away from heavy and explicit Marxist theory in the classroom toward a more global vision within curriculum, over all more family participation, and other radical curricular reforms that addressed both academic and material deficits (102). However, the educational objectives of the government shifted during the economic crisis of the Special Period. The dollarization, permitted as a result of the economic depression, created even greater inequality and set the stage for Cuba’s contemporary economic state (Smith 16). The impact greatly impacted the amount of school supplies and many teachers left the teaching force to work in other industries. Despite these circumstances, the school system experienced a general decentralization and a number of new innovations to further student engagement and teacher preparation. The state attempted to counteract the individualism, brought on by the class structure created by the tourist and black market industries, through re-emphasizing collective participation (Smith 15). These efforts included initiatives to incorporate youth projects that address social problems (50). The end of the Special Period brought in new Revolutionary efforts that worked to re-vamp Civic Education to better instill ideas of nationalism, collectivism, anti-imperialism, and opposition to capitalism. While some argue that the shortcomings of economic shifts over shadowed the efforts to instill ideas of a Revolutionary conciencia and create “The New Man”, these political ideologies are still deeply embedded in Cuba’s contemporary system, a system that still promotes a curriculum that is based on universal notions of national identity and ultimately still acts a tool national development and modernity.

Where does this thesis fit in?

Understanding the complex nature of the Cuba's past political climate and how political ideologies manifested themselves in educational reform is important because contemporary political and economic issues are rooted in these events. This remarkable act of resistance that we know to be the Cuban Revolution demonstrates the capacity of collective human effort. The resilience and persistence of the Cuban economic model is a testament to the possibility of the utilization of alternative economic models that seek to prioritize people and unity over capital and individualism. Although this is a political project that is constructed and exists within a global market that is both in direct opposition and actively working against the success of Cuba, it is still necessary to criticize the Revolution's shortcomings.

With this historical context in mind, this investigation seeks to answer the following questions: What is the state of Black representation of within Cuba's educational framework and curriculum? How is Eurocentricity visible within both curriculum and social dynamics in schools? How do implicit ideologies of whiteness continue to otherize and further exclude Black people and other historically marginalized groups? From the perspective of Black activists and organizers from Havana, how do the schools systems address race and national identity? How do the school systems shape or inform your identity? How do the instructional methods of the school systems differ from the popular education utilized in community school/ workshops? What is the importance of racial empowerment in a colorblind society? In other words, this project seeks to examine the clash between Cubanidad, the post revolution national identity,

and Black racial empowerment as it is presented in discussed in two differing educational spaces.

The concepts I will be analyzing in this paper are being put forth at a very peculiar point in history in which the world is undergoing drastic changes and developments that speak directly to the importance of this work. Currently, we are on the verge of an irreversible global climate change crisis that has arguable been created by the greed, waste, individualism, and exploitation that are both permissible under and produced by capitalism. Arguably, this waste has been created and exacerbated by the corporations of the west and the “global north”, and in the vain of dependency theory, at the expense of the global south who experience the most violent and disastrous affects of climate change. The world is witnessing a rise far right governments and fascist dictators who only look to further the harm done by neoliberal and capitalistic economic policy which we know has only created more poverty, displacement, hunger, and death for the majority, but more specifically the most vulnerable among us. These destructive forces have worked together to subvert and undermine nations and movements that reject neoliberal models for more sustainable alternatives that work to disprove the notion United States’ economic model is the epic center of the world. With that being stated, the underlying idea is that alternatives must be explored at the macro and micro level for both social and educational systems alike.

In many ways, this work recognizes the triumphs and the importance of the Cuban Revolution while also highlighting the viability of the Cuban model & community based initiatives yet it acknowledges that it is not exempt from criticism.

This thesis is entering into a body of literature on the Cuban Education System and Race in the Latin American context, which are both highly polarized and under researched. Kwame Dixon and Ollie Johnson III argue that a lack of data and recognition of Black populations in Latin American countries can be attributed to ideas of racial democracy and harmony and that Latin American Studies and Comparative Politics programs generally ignore the topic of race. Nonetheless, this thesis is for the Black student of the Diaspora who never saw themselves or anyone of their complexion in their history textbook as much as it is for the historian or ethnographer who is seeking to understand the ways in which the school system furthers the colonial project through state sanctioned racialized violence and erasure under the language of socialist forms of development or modernity. This work is also for those who are seeking to enhance their understanding and methodology by being exposed to the ways in which Black grass roots movements and organizations seek to inform and collectively improve their communities.

Chapter 2: Literature review & Methodology

Literature Review

Race in the Revolution and Its Contemporary Context

Race in the context of Latin America is completely different than what we know to be true here in the United States where we tend to identify our race based on factors such as skin complexion and lineage (“the one drop rule”). Despite the many similarities and parallels between the struggles of African people of the Diaspora throughout the world, it is important to understand the complexities of race and colonialism, specifically from the Cuban context.

Cuba is a racially diverse nation but it is difficult to gauge exactly how many Black people live on the island because of the inconsistencies and the general reliability of the data provided by the national census that is given every ten years. According to the World Directory of Minority and Indigenous People, since 1989, which was the start of the Special Period, attaining data concerning social trends on the island has been particularly difficult and virtually unavailable other than what is provided in articles and books that are published from within Cuba (Minority Rights Group). Despite this fact, Cuba’s census on the racial breakdown of the island is based on self-identification, which can be problematic when being Black carries a social stigma causing many Cubans of color to opt for mestizo (mixed race) or white.

According to a national census that was taken in 2012, it is estimated that 64.1 % of the population is white, 10.1 % identify as Black, and 24.9 % identify as mestizos (one.cu). Many government entities have actually estimated the Black population to be around 60% but because of historical efforts at blanqueamiento and deliberate attempts

to undercount the Black population, it is difficult to understand exactly how many Afro-Cubans there are (one.cu). Cuban researcher and activist Robert Zurbarano states "...the numerical fraud [the census] puts us at less than one-fifth of the population. Many people forget that in Cuba, a drop of white blood can — if only on paper — make a mestizo, or white person, out of someone who in social reality falls into neither of those categories"(Zurbarano). In his article "For Blacks in Cuba, the Revolution Hasn't Begun" he mentions that the visible number of Black people in Cuba undermine these statistics while also establishing that Afro-Cubans are both visibly and significantly underrepresented in universities and other economic and social spheres of power (Zurbarano). Black exclusion is also apparent in Cuba's most lucrative sector: tourism, where the more sought after or higher paying position are often times given to white or lighter skin Cubans. In other words, though it may be difficult to access reliable data, beginning that process is important because it attempts to visibilize various racial and ethnic representations in the work force and varying institutions.

These statistics are vital because they give insight into whether the government is actually working to combat institutional racism or if it is simply complying with statistics provided by the national census(AfroCubaweb). In a way, this data also measures the effectiveness of the Revolution, Cuban socialism and its stance to eradicate racial discrimination. Though Afro-Cubans were considered to be one of the primary benefactors of the Revolution and the ideological shift to socialism under Castro, one must acknowledge that both the internal and external factors that contribute to the perceived shortcomings of the social system. Robert Zurbarano states "[Cuban] socialism has been peripheral, underdeveloped, and economically dependent" and that

one of its limitations is the form of internal colonialism it has created (Zurbano 232). Cuban socialism is peripheral and underdeveloped in that it exist within a larger global capitalist market that has not only thwarted its growth, but also because for decades, Cuba has been on the receiving end of countless imperialist and neocolonial aggressions from the United States that have manifested themselves in the form of embargos and economic blockades. Additionally, Cuba's economic dependency derives from its past relationship with the Soviet Union that initiated Cuba's economic crisis. However, in his article "Racism vs. Socialism: a misplaced conflict (notes on/ against internal colonialism)", Zurbano argues in spite of the many state driven emancipatory efforts, the hegemonic practices and universalist nature of Cuba's contemporary political paradigm reinforce Eurocentric and oppressive colonial structures. He states:

The question this time is that the racial consciousness of that Black individual of socialism does not have to be overwhelmed by his own political consciousness, but the latter also incorporates the demands of his racial situation. It happens that the tension between both identities is generated by a relation of power, where a racial (White) hegemony exerts a hidden psychosocial pressure over a Black individual who de-racialized his social struggle space when, at the beginning of the Revolution, he saw himself on the road to equality. (Zurbano "Racism vs. Socialism", 236)

Essentially, Zurbano is establishing that the vertical nature of the practices of the Revolution and its political ideology promoted a rhetoric that encouraged a national identity that lacked an intersectional approach to liberation of marginalized Cuban people. In an effort to empower Cuban people, it further excluded Black people who experienced oppression on two levels: one derived from the constraints of US imperialism and capitalism and also, from domestic racism. This idea also critiques the way in which national Cuban identity almost places pressure on Afro-Cubans to choose.

It insinuates that on the path to equality, the de-racialization of one's identity entails the suppression of the other in order to achieve this project. While ideas of *Blanqueamiento* and a general lack of racial consciousness continue to persist, ideas of collective gratitude from those who participated in the Revolution (p. 237) and those who are still devout to its' cause, have contributed to the hindrance of the resurgence of anti-racism political debates while creating an internalized crisis within the politically motivated Afro-Cuban. This is what WEB Dubois referred to as a double consciousness.

You might be wondering how are W.E. B Dubois' ideas of a double consciousness relevant to contextualizing the racial climate within a supposed egalitarian society like Cuba. The idea of double consciousness came up a few times in some of the interviews I conducted in Havana. Dubois' "double consciousness" refers to the internal and shared feeling of the politically aware Black Americans who must exist with the profound understanding that they are perpetually viewing themselves from the lens of others. The Black American corporally embodies and internalizes the conflicting notions of what it means to be both Black and American at the same time. In the *Souls of Black Folk* he states, "...this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self . [...]He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face" (Dubois 1903,3). Though Dubois is an American writer speaking from his own experience, his Pan African ideals and the feelings of attempting to reconcile one's own race within a nationalistic framework that seeks to universalize and homogenize an imagined community within its borders, is a shared experience of Black people of the Diaspora.

Accordingly, to apply this knowledge of identity and a double consciousness it begs the questions: How does Blackness exist and thrive within the parameters of Cubanidad that are inculcated through state schooling? Or does it? Where is it located?

While it is debated what motivated Fidel to discuss racism on a national platform, Alejandro de la Fuente, in his book *A Nation for All* he highlights the achievements of the Revolution while shedding light on the negligence of the government and the harmful actions taken toward limiting and ultimately hindering Black organizing efforts for the sake of unifying the nation. While he establishes that ideas of racial harmony pre-date the Revolution, he addresses that Afro-Cuban culture during 60s and 70s was considered “a cultural atavism incongruent with the construction of modernity” (de la Fuente 336). However, despite a more integrated education system and new ethics taught in the school after the Revolution, the housing crisis contributed to the rise of multi-generational family living situations, which also created a different form of socialization for the youth, causing them to adopt and perpetuate the older generation’s perception of race. It is these examples that he utilizes that allows the reader to conceptualize how and where Afro-Cuban culture and Africanness fit into the historical perceptions of Cuban nationhood. Alejandro argues that part of creating a color blind society meant maintaining a culture of silence on the issue of race that existed at both an institutional level and also as a part of the common social discourse. These arguments and historiographies are important because they provide a necessary context to the national discourse, which is what is disseminated throughout the school systems.

Other intellectuals that elaborate on the intersections of race, national identity, and

the school systems are writers such as Walterio Carbonell, an Afro-Cuban man who asserts in his book *Crítica: Cómo surgió la cultura nacional*, that Cuba must adopt a “historical consciousness” that rejects the “bourgeoisie conceptions” of culture and an “aristocratic interpretation” in the formation of Cubanidad that was utilized in the Revolution. Ultimately, he argues that this consciousness must seek to give space to Africa and its descendants their rightful place in the process of defining Cuban identity (qtd.in de la Fuente 287). This is point is particularly important because this lack of space in defining what is Cubanidad is evident in what several Cuban historians and social critics refer to as the Revolution’s folklorization of African religion, particularly in the tourism industry. This will later serve as evidence of how the Cuban school system interact with students who practice these religions and cover them in history that contribute to the further misunderstanding and marginalization of Black knowledges or epistemologies.

Prominent Afro-Cuban economist and professor at the University of Havana Esteban Morales Dominguez asserts that though vestiges of racism and discrimination are rooted in slavery and the colonial era, they were also exacerbated by Republican capitalism and US intervention that utilized race as an instrument of power and domination. He argues that it is inherently tied to exploitation, which was used by elite and hegemonic powers to accumulate wealth and maintain power, but ultimately could not be dismantled because of Black peoples’ inability to bequeath notions of inferiority imposed upon them from the colonial era (Morales 40). Yulexis Almeida Junco, assistant professor of Sociology at the University of Havana, states in her Master’s thesis entitled “ *Género y Racialidad: Un estudio de Representaciones Sociales En el*

barrio “La Timba” that:

“Los cambios experimentados en el panorama social cubano después del triunfo de la Revolución lograron desmontar políticas articuladoras de procesos discriminatorios basados en el color de la piel, en el orden público y a nivel institucional. Sin embargo no tuvieron el mismo impacto en la subjetividad de las cubanas y los cubanos”(Almeida 41).

Put differently, Almeida recognizes that the Revolution made significant changes at the institutional level to end race based discrimination but it definitively fell short of expelling racist ideologies that exist among individual Cubans. The data presented throughout this thesis will address how community schooling attempts improve racial consciousness with the hopes that changes individual Cubans understanding of how race exists and how it utilized. The follow section attempts to analyze the logic of coloniality as it relates to Afro-Cuban and other subaltern knowledges.

Colonialism/ Decoloniality

Cuba is not far removed, both by time and space, from the violence of colonial rule during its many encounters with foreign intervention. However, the Revolution sought to invoke the language that was utilized by the independence revolutionary Jose Marti. Cuba’s educational system is internationally celebrated for contributing to the development of the world’s most educated and literate population but when we detach ourselves from liberal, removed, and contemporary conceptions of education, as a tool to liberate oneself from the chains of poverty, it allows us the potential to view state driven educational as a tool in the construction of both an imposed and an imagined national identity. Schools system and educational practices reflect over-arching and hegemonic political ideologies that seek to instill certain kinds of thought into students.

School systems are one of the main components to furthering the legacy of contemporary coloniality. Walter D. Mignolo in his essay "Coloniality of Power" says "...Colonialism ended with independence (in Latin America, Asia, or Africa), but not coloniality". He goes on to state that coloniality is a key component of Western conceptions of modernity and although the historical period of colonialism has ended that the legacy and influence of coloniality of power is still deeply embedded in the systems, institutions, and attitudes of those who rose to power after imperial rule (Mignolo 433).

It is the civilizing missions and imposed notions of improvement from these colonial systems that create subalternity. These institutions construct the discourse around which are acceptable forms of knowledge productions and which ones are not, and ultimately these constructions utilized as a mean to convey the ideology of hegemonic powers. These articulations of dominance worked together toward the formation of nation building. Frantz Fanon, in his analysis on the societal and psychological effects of colonization on the otherized body in the *Wretched of the Earth* discusses how the Manichean thought has contributed to the development on nationhood. He states:

The problem of truth ought also to be considered. In every age, among the people, truth is the property of the national cause. No absolute verity, no discourse on the purity of the soul, can shake this position. The native replies to the living lie of the colonial situation by an equal falsehood. His dealings with his fellow-nationals are open; they are strained and incomprehensible with regard to the settlers. Truth is that which hurries on the breakup of the colonialist regime; it is that which promotes the emergence of the nation; it is all that protects the natives, and ruins the foreigners. In this colonialist context there is no truthful behavior: and the good is quite simply that which is evil for "them"(50).

These words can be interpreted in a number of different ways. Here Fanon implies that truth, though filled with the potential to undermine the imagined authenticity of nationhood, is produced by dominant powers to perpetuate the falsehood of what is the particular colonial circumstance. This universal mode of “truth”, a production of knowledge created by the “native”, is established at the expense of the “them”. Put simply, western conceptions of nationhood do not exist without an “us” and a “them” and these produced “truths” uphold and legitimate the settler or colonial interpretation of nationhood.

If it is the nation that is defining the terms of Cuban identity through the instruction of the school system then these assertions call into question of de la Fuentes ideas of Cubanidad which indicate that Cuban national identity do not evade Blackness, rather, post Revolution notions of Cubanidad incorporate Cuba’s African roots. How is this even possible given historical evidence that documents and re-affirms Cuba’s long history of excluding Black narratives? Additionally, how does de la Fuente’s thought justify the living conditions and negation of Blackness visible in Cuba’s national census?

Varying conceptualizations of nationhood provide insight into the conflicting notions of Cubanidad. In his book *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson defines the term “nation” as an imagined political community that is both limited and sovereign. His argument is rooted in European notions of nation states that expanded with the rise of capitalism and the print press but his assertion derive from the personal and collective estrangement from a history that cannot totally be recalled and therefore must be narrated(Anderson 39). Though Anderson’s analysis bares more toward acknowledging that this may be a consequence of human fallibility, it is arguable that

there is some intentionality here. Universalist tendencies within western conceptions of nationhood and pedagogical mediums like schooling and media are heavily criticized for the ways in which they do not give visibility to marginalized communities yet continue to construct and perpetuate representations that favor certain bodies over others. The fragility of these constructions is easily ruptured when analyzing both the social and economic disparities that exist among marginalized communities.

Black exclusion from social and economic spheres of power necessitated the role of activism and organizing in communities in Cuba and though Black organizations were consistently confronted with resistance and repression, it begs the question: why do demands for autonomy and the existence of Black organizations clash heavily with dominant ideas of nationhood? Anthony Bogues et al in his book of collected essays on Black Liberation identifies Black Nationalism to be both the re-assertion of Blackness and the political awakening of Black people that incites a sense of pride in the face of oppression. Additionally, Bogues argues "...the cultural reawakening is only authentic when it is in an integral part of a political understanding which leads to action against the source of oppression"(Bogues et al 52). The backlash in opposition to collective efforts to organize and empower their own Black communities speaks to the infirmity of hegemonic notions of national identity.

The rhetoric of the Revolution has adopted an anti colonial stance but fails to recognize how it continues to uphold these assumptions. The impact of foreign influence over Cuba as a sovereign nation has yet to see an end but because forms of structural oppression persist many would argue that the conversation surrounding colonialism has now shifted to that of an internal problematic. Mexican sociologist,

Pablo Gonzales Casanova, claims that colonialism is a phenomenon that is both international and intranational. In reference to the effects of national structures on marginalized groups, he states "...treatment, with prejudices, and perceptions of the colonized man as a thing, is linked to the internal policy of the colonial society, to a policy of manipulation and discrimination which appears in the juridical, educational, linguistic, and administrative order which tends to sanction and increase the social dichotomies and the relation of domination and exploitation characteristic of colonies"(Gonzalez 36). In other terms, the colonial legacy is not only just replicated on an individual level, nor is it exclusively the result of foreign intervention, but it is unfolded with a much more systematic approach that is legitimized by the state. Past and current institutionalized efforts to combat racism, which are remnants of the colonial and pre-revolutionary era, either don't go far enough or continue to utilize flippant language of a colorblind society. Roberto Zurbano claims that in the Cuban context, specifically during Cuba's Revolutionary period and Sovietización, internal colonialism became more evident during the shift to socialism. He calls for the decolonization and de-idealization of the hegemonic practices of Cuban socialism as the only viable option (Zurbano "Racism vs. Socialism" 230). Eurocentric state driven education in Cuba that not only adopts to a colorblind approach to race, folklorizes or fails to include Black history all together is where these pieces are most visible.

How does Cuba begin to enact policies that are rooted in decoloniality? Where does this take place? Is it at an individual level or an institutional level? It is apparent that a general lack of inclusion has contributed to the establishment and necessitated Black organizing that seek to raise racial consciousness in Cuba. Decoloniality or

decolonization has become a bit of a buzzword over the past decade in academia. I assert that decolonization is the collective healing process in which historically marginalized groups of people, or institutions, attempt to undergo in order to strip away both the internal and external effects that centuries of colonialism has imposed on the mind, bodies, and cultures of all colonized people. Notions of decolonization have always existed but have been formally theorized and documented in academic institution. Nonetheless, the term has been utilized in both Cuban literature and organizing spaces however the educational efforts put forth to subvert institutional efforts to indoctrinate or impose national ideology, are more often referred to as popular education.

Many organization and activists utilize popular education as a means of asserting their autonomy and informing their community. Arguably, popular education is a form of decolonial work. Popular Education is rooted in the theories and practices of Brazilian educator and community organizer Paulo Freire who worked with campesinos in the countryside to provide them with opportunities to become literate while acquiring a more in depth political understanding of their reality. This form of schooling is particularly difficult to define because it manifests itself differently in every country and community that chooses to utilize popular education.

Popular Education is a philosophical approach that does not have a specific set of tools or curriculum, yet it is a liberatory practice that seeks to move beyond traditional institutional practices that Freire refers to as the banking system. The banking system is an authoritarian and vertical form of instruction that identifies the teacher as the beholder of knowledge whose responsibility is to fill the minds of the students with

knowledge, as if they were empty receptacles. Popular education also motivates participants to develop a profound political understanding of their own realities and oppression while encouraging social change. In her essay “ *El rol de la Educación en La Hegemonía del Bloque Popular*”, Cuban writer Marcia Gracia Núñez, states “...la educación popular parte de un enfoque del saber que presenta una postura antiautoritaria contra la dominación, la explotación, y la exclusión, emplea una metodología que procura despertar la iniciativa, el sentido crítico y la creatividad, tratando de que los sujetos sean protagonistas de la interacción educativa” (197). Popular education is more than student center learning, it seeks to dismantle the traditional hierarchy in the classroom that seeks to replicate oppressive systems while acknowledging and actively utilizing the wisdom of each participants so that they to are producers of knowledge, rather than submissive recipients.

Some would argue that the entire framework and rhetoric of Freire ideas of Popular Education barely include the critiques or objectives Black Cuban organizations are looking to accomplish. Whether Freire was intentionally ambiguous with the language of his philosophy is neither here nor there. What is worthy of analysis is K. Wayne Yang and Eve Tuck’s critique of what they refer to as “move to innocence “ in their analysis of how the term “ decolonization” is utilized. This is identified in their article “Decolonization is not a Metaphor” where they state that while using pedagogy that aids people in conceptualizing the violence of settler colonialism and promotes the rejection of domination, exploitation and settler epistemologies, that “until stolen land is relinquished, critical consciousness does not translate into action that disrupt settler colonialism” (19). Tuck and Yang’s critique is pertinent here because these critiques

are not just specific to the US and additionally, they call into question the nature of the Popular Education framework and its ability to deliver the desired objectives of Black organization.

My assertion is that, within understanding Blackness in the Cuban context, these initiatives are still decolonial in nature. Cuba, its relationship with land and the indigenous population originally from the island are starting from a different point of departure than that which is referenced in Tuck and Yang's work. It is not uncommon to hear that the Tainos, the indigenous population of Cuba, were exterminated and no longer exist. However, this is far from the truth. Although there isn't extensive research on indigeneity in Cuba, many Cuban anthropologists and historians have documented the accounts of the Tainos who still live in the far East and rural areas of Cuba. Though it is difficult to find sources about the Tainos, who are also mixed much like the rest of the population, or specific demands or claims to land, it does not make them any less true or relevant to Yang and Eve's claim about decolonization. Cuban scholar, Larry Cata Backer, in his article "From Hatuey to Che: Indigenous Cuba without Indians and the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples argues that while Jose Marti's writing both romanticized and utilized narratives of racial mixing and indigenous struggle to put forward ideas of mestizaje, Fidel's deification of Hatuey's resistance efforts against the Spanish during the First Independence War were co-opted in order to encourage others to rally behind an anti-imperial stances. Ultimately, my point is that the indigenous and Black struggle for autonomy are two sides of the same coin. They are not separate but both working to combat the oppressive nature of universalist tendencies of the Revolution that have subsumed racial and ethnic identity, relegated

them to a cultural past, and ultimately resulted in their exclusion. While, popular education may not exactly repatriate indigenous land, it does provide a critical lens and the proper tools to historically silenced groups to assess their reality in order to better vocalize and assert their autonomy which is arguably the first step in decolonial work.

It is evident that varying conceptualizations of race, coloniality, decoloniality, and identity within the framework of nationhood is complex and does not have simply one interpretation. However, all of these pieces play a vital role in our understanding of the Education system in Cuba and why Black organizing is both popular and necessary in order to raise racial consciousness and to collectively re-assert their visibility, knowledge, and narratives.

Methodology

This investigation focused on understanding the current state of Black representation in educational curriculum in school systems in Havana, Cuba while simultaneously analyzing the relationship between Black exclusion and how it relates to Black organizing. This investigation took on a mixed methods approach that consisted of interviews, archival research, and participant observation. The beginning stages of this research were particularly difficult because the Internet in Cuba is both limited and very expensive so contacting people in order to set up meetings and interviews was a slow and tedious process. Nonetheless, I was able to set up a few interviews prior to my departure. Most of the people I interviewed are teachers, community educators, academics and college professors, activists, organizers, and artists. My objective was to observe and answer the following questions: How is Black identity defined within Cuban society and within Cuban identity? What are the objectives and the over all

significance of Black community organizing? How are Black people represented in society? Additionally, how are they represented in both curriculums and varying positions within the school systems?

Most of the researched conducted on Cuban Education within the past 20 to 30 years tend to document the historical evolution of educational policy, focus on the success or shortcomings of the educational outcomes of Cuban Revolution like literacy, graduation and attendance rates, or research has investigated the inner workings of Cuba's socially progressive musical and sexual education curriculums and their societal impacts. Often times, these works seek to explore the intrinsic structural differences between socialist informed curriculums specifically in comparison to the US or international neoliberal forms of schooling. Quite frankly, the existing of body literature that explores how political ideologies manifest themselves into policy and curriculum are both limited and highly polarized. Yet, many works of these works refrain from adequately covering the question of race and how such an important facet to Cuban culture is recognized by the state. It is for this reason that I seek to explore the relationship between the state/school system and people of African descent.

It is not easy to travel to Cuba under the current administration and traveling to Cuba for research purposes can be an incredible experience and challenging at the same time. Recently, the 45th president of the United States has instated new travel restrictions against the Cuban government, which has contributed to a much smaller US traveler presence on the island, which as a result has been quite devastating for the Cuban economy. Many scholars pursue state or institutional recognition prior

conducting research in Cuba but this route has many benefits and challenges. It has been noted that though researchers are provided much more direct access to educators, students, and intimate educational spaces than what I was able to accomplish in my time there, it comes with its own sort of dilemmas that, to an extent, could potentially compromise the authenticity of the data that is collected. For example, many scholars address that they were able to visit schools and talk to teachers and students but they were shown schools that were more modern, high achieving schools, and schools that were generally in nicer areas. In conjunction with a very much planned agenda that the state organizes for some researchers, Denise Blum in her book *Cuban Youth and Revolutionary Values: Educating the New Socialist Citizen* documents how she attained an educational research visa only to have state officials frequently check in on her and interrogate her about how she intends to depict Cuba for fear of defamation of the much celebrated accomplishment of the Revolution. Additionally, my research incorporates narratives from educators who work both within the school systems and community organizing spaces, so they provide a perspective that is, by nature of their participation in community schooling, more racially conscious and critical of the role of the state in education. Though the surveillance of Blum's project warrants the most serious of criticism, situating one's work within an already existing and highly polarized body of literature is not only extremely difficult but demands that this project be taken on with the utmost respect for the communities that were kind enough to share their realities with me.

It was with all of this in mind that I decided not pursue institutional recognition for this preliminary round of research. I had traveled to Cuba prior to conducting research

so I utilized my contacts from my first trip, people I had connected with from various organizations via social media, contacts from some of my professors and mentors, and snow ball sampling from the people I interviewed in order to gain different perspectives and to develop a more well rounded perspective on race and different forms of schooling in Havana.

My intention with the project was for it to act as a preliminary endeavor that I hope to expand on in the future. I was in Cuba for 3 weeks and I was able to meet with an array of different people. I interviewed 16 different people, all of whom are educators in some capacity, either in the school systems or that organize and work in the community, or both. Most of the interviews lasted between 45 minutes to an hour and half and were quite informal. I started most of the interview by just exchanging basic information with the interviewees. I told them a bit about myself and why this work is important to me. At this point, it is important to recognize my positionality as researcher. Although my take maybe subjective and privileged due to the fact that, whether I am well versed in the complexities of global south and subaltern realities, my gaze and conceptualization of the topics presented are inextricably tied to a Western / US gaze. However, my point of departure in terms of how I connect with the people I am interviewing is quite different than that of a white non-Latinx ethnographer. I am a self identify Afro-Latinx woman and visibly non-white but I am light skin and in a Caribbean context potentially white passing. In addition to this, I am of Chilean descent but because of my upbringing in Caribbean communities, I have much more a Caribbean sounding accent but most importantly, many of the groups I was interview are not only Black organizations but Black and Queer organizations that not only work to raise racial

consciousness but also work to empower women and the LGBTQI+ community, and dismantle oppressive hegemonic and patriarchal forces within Cuba. It is important that to identify here that I am openly gay woman and in sharing this with some of the people I interview it allows me a sense of access to spaces and knowledge that not many people would have the chance to see. I also shared a lot of my experiences as a high school teacher, and understanding my role as a state worker and how I was complicit in a colonial project and cognizant of these nuances. I presented myself as an active participant, organizer, and supporter of international and anti-imperial efforts, but also a comrade and an accomplice in the struggle for Black liberation.

The make up these of these interviews varied based on the person who I was speaking to but almost all of these interviews touched on or started with how each person identifies in terms of their race and national identity. There are a number of different terms people use to identify themselves and some of them are:” AfroCubana/o/x”, “Negra”, “ de descendencia africana”, “de origen africano”, or simply Cuban. In this thesis I choose to utilize the term “Black” when referring to people of African descent in recognition and out of respect for the varying forms of self identity, in order to not reify ideas of nationhood, “Black” was the most frequently recognized and utilized identity and the act of using it is ultimately one of the objectives of the popular education. It is difficult not to apply a US conceptualization of race but often times, the interview discussed the parallels to US forms of racism or oppression.

In conjunction with the interviews, and in order to develop an understanding of the differing notions of race, religion, and spirituality I spent time a significant amount of time conducting archival research in library of the Museo de las Orishas. Here I

dedicated lots of time reading and analyzing the ethnographies of prominent Cuban writers who document the inner workings and complexities of Afro-Cuban religions, knowledges, and culture. Additionally, in this project I utilized participant observation as a research method. This was done at a workshop I was invited to where I was able to witness dialogue and debate among the community that spoke to the importance of racial consciousness. Lastly, I will be utilizing examples of talleres that are documented on several online mediums and social media. All of the data that was collected from the interviews and the participant observation have been coded and organized according to themes. These themes were organized in charts and mind maps in order to decipher what are some of the most important themes that arose during my field research. I have conducted a discourse analysis on key excerpts from the interviews along with documentation of talleres that are provided on blogs and social media.

Although contact and interviews have been conducted over the course of a few months, the field research for this thesis was conducted over a 3 week time period in Havana. I consider this work to be a very brief take on the educational system. Educational ethnography requires much more time in the community and a much more in depth and first hand look at the school systems. I was able to visit a school and conduct an interview with a principal and some teachers but this is a much different experience than being able to shadow a teacher and observe classes for an extended period of time. Admitting that I did not have extensive access to the school reflects the inherent lack of depth in my data collected on schools, nonetheless, my objective was to achieve a baseline understanding of the school system and organizations that was not influenced by the state and very much rooted in the experience of the community.

Chapter 3: The Education System

Then the Revolution said “Let us make a New man in OUR Revolutionary image, according to OUR Revolutionary likeness and let them rule over the means of production and while we dispel those who exploit the land, its people, and resources”.

The Revolution created the New Man in the image of the Revolution. He created them, Cuban and non-Cuban, Revolucionario y disidente.

Cuba is considered to have one of the most egalitarian education systems in the world. It is a system that works to provide high quality and universal education and health care for all Cubans. It is a system that is frequently applauded and highly admired by leftist educators and reformist across the world that firmly believe in the transformative nature of education and the possibility of economic reform in order to close the “achievement gap”. At the same rate, it is also a system that is frequently criticized for the way in which it explicitly indoctrinates students with Revolutionary ideals. As Rosi Smith states in her *book Education, Citizenship, and National Identity*, the social gains, brought about by radical shifts in policy after the Revolution, are what have maintained the legitimacy of the system (4). According to a census conducted in 1953, 55.6% of students between the age of 6 and 14 were attending primary school while only 16.5 % of students between the ages of 15-19 years old were even enrolled

in secondary education. During this time period, it was documented that Cuba had a population of 5.8 million people and 1 million of them were considered to be illiterate. These alarming statistics were much more present in the countryside where 41.7 % of the population over 10 years old were illiterate while the rate of illiteracy was even higher among woman (qtd. in Sabina 135).

By 1961, with the efforts of the National Literacy Campaign, Cuba had virtually eradicated illiteracy on the island while improving access to education for many marginalized communities through the universalization of all levels of schooling. Additionally, compulsory educational reforms greatly improved school attendance and retention. Today, students are required to attend school until 9th and Cuba has maintained some of the highest literacy rates in all of Latin America. Based on data provided by UNESCO, compulsory education has made it so that the net enrollment rate in primary education in 2017 was at 96.93 % enrollment but only 86.67 % in secondary education and even worse in tertiary education with 40.28% enrollment. The focus of this study is to wholly understand how Blackness and Black narratives are both represented and excluded in terms of the teaching force, the curriculum, and education related statistical data, particularly from the perspective of educators who have worked both within and outside the system to improve the educational experiences and the quality of life of Afro-Cuban people. The purpose of the aforementioned data is to illuminate just some of substantial gains the Revolution has made but analysis of qualitative data collected during my time in Havana demonstrates the ways in which this egalitarian system perpetuates oppressive and authoritarian tendencies, and excludes Black identity.

During my field research in Havana, I encountered some difficulty trying to find educational data about enrollment, retention, drop out and graduation rate, discipline, or even data regarding the amount of students who attend post secondary institutions. More importantly, I was looking for data that also provided a racial and ethnic breakdown of students in the school systems. However, I had a few very important realizations. First, this would require a much more intimate connection with research institutions and the schools systems than what I was able to attain in my brief stay there. My second realization was that in a nation where both people and institutions not only deny the existence of structural racism but also deny both the existence and impact of internal capitalism, which is exacerbated by unauthorized private industries and tourism, finding data that legitimates these claims might be next to impossible. The third realization was that this data does exist and has been published in blogs, journals and articles that are not well known. Lastly, data on the racial breakdown of student outcomes is not as a defined and well developed as other nations might have. Nonetheless, what I did find sheds light on the realities faced by many Afro-Cubans.

In an article entitled, “Universidades Negras”, posted on the black feminist blog spot entitled NEGRA TIENE QUE SER, Dainerys Mesa Padron provides insight into the reality of the Afro-Cuban experiences in universities. Based on data provided by la Educación Superior en Cuba, 66.1% of university students are white, 20.7 % are mestizo and 13.2 % are black. This data is based off of the 2012 census data, which has been proven faulty for attempts at whitening. According to another study discussed in the article, based on surveys from a peripheral area of Havana called, San Miguel, more than 45% of the Black population do not attend Higher education, while among the

mestizos its only 30%. While invoking this data may seem arbitrary or isolate, the article identifies that generally across the island Black and mestizo students have less access and are less likely to attend higher education as compared to their white Cuban counterparts. Even with an education system that seeks to provide access to all, there are still factors that have a bearing on the matriculation and the retention of Black and Brown students in the university (Padron).

Many of the points identified in the article are reminiscent of an interview I did with two professors from the University of Havana and radical popular educators about what are the factors that contribute to the exclusion of Afro-Cuban people from accessing higher education. Aleyda Perez, who is a part of a network of Afrodescendant popular educators, establishes that one of the largest factors to class struggle on the island is Cuban Remittance. Basically, remittance is the money sent back to Cuba from family members who have left the island. During the time of the Revolution when the Castros identified that they planned to nationalize the land and the wealth, many of the island's elite fled in exile for fear of the redistribution of their wealth. Nonetheless, because of the racialized class structure of Cuba prior to the Revolution, many white Cubans both had the means to leave and possessed the majority of the nations wealth so they were able to send back more money to their families. White Cubans who fled to the US were able to find success and accumulate wealth quicker due to their networks here and racism in US allowing them to give more back than Afro-Cubans who are no longer living in Cuba.

The average salary in Cuba is the equivalent to about \$25 US a month and because that isn't always enough for people to meet their needs, remesa (remittance)

makes a huge difference for the general quality of life for many Cuban families. Aleyda stated in the most direct way that Afro-Cuban students have less access because many live in worse neighbor hoods where the quality of education is not as caliber as what is provided in “El Vedado”. “El Vedado” was frequently referenced by educators I interviewed as an affluent part of Havana, with better schools. She also stated that for the students who do get it into the university, it is difficult to stay in the university. White students receive more money from the outside therefore they can afford all of the materials they need to be successful in school, they can afford to travel to and from, and they can afford electronics to write essays, and to feed themselves while they are. Universal education does not cover these expenses making it virtually not an option for the average Black family. Additionally, some students do not have financial capacity to attend part time or even full time, because they have to work.

Theo Rodriguez, who is also an educator, mentioned that it is for this very same reason that some students choose not to go to college or even continue with school after what the state requires. He stated that going to college takes away from time that people can use to work in order to provide for their families. Additionally, he stated that a college education only prepares you for a job that will receive a government-regulated salary rather than a job in a private industry. The pay associated with state positions is not as lucrative as the tourist industry. It has even impacted the rate at which people are becoming teachers. While there Black and mestiza women are well represented among the work forces of teachers, many Cubans have left education in order to work in tourism because it makes more money, almost 2-3x as much as one would make as an educator.

It is important to understand that education everywhere in the world does not exist in a vacuum. There are always economic factors that contribute to the academic outcomes of students. Cubans of African descent face higher rates of unemployment, are more likely to be involved in black market business, live in worse housing conditions, and in many cities, they make up the majority of the prison population. As Alejandro de la Fuente taught us that it is problematic to solely link the Revolution to racial justice when it did not dismantle a colonial structure that perpetuates both an economic inequality and racial discrimination but rather created a culture of universalism that negates these differences and erases voices that disrupt the harmony of universal thought. It is the notion of universality and national unity that becomes a political ideology that informs the structuring of the school system.

Many of the educational ideologies put forth as constructed by Post revolution efforts were rooted in theories of the New Man, developed and defined by Che Guevara. Che believed that the New Man is an important being and facet to the revolutionary process, it is an unfinished person who is ever learning and evolving and co-constructed during development of the socialist nation state. Che deeply understood the dialectical relationship between school systems and prevailing economic systems. He once stated in an essay “...communism is a goal of humanity which can be attained with conscience. Therefore, education, the removal of the defects of the former society from the people’s consciences becomes extremely important. [...] It should not be forgotten that without a parallel progress in production it would not be possible to ever build such a society”(qtd. in in Turner 110). This Freirean appeal calls on the collective expulsion of the individualistic tendencies created by pre-Revolution,

capitalistic Cuba by instilling not only a sense of class-consciousness but also an anti-imperial stance in Cuban citizens. This begs the question: How is this educational consciousness structured? How can we identify the roots? How do these notions exclude Black narratives in the construction of national identity, or what Denise Blum would identify as a political religion? This chapter explores a variety of literature that analyze the embedded political ideologies of Cuban curriculum while highlighting concrete evidence from my case study that work to shed light on specific examples in which the contemporary school systems otherize Black narratives. This is visible in both in the excerpts from my interviews that speak to this topic and forms of literature. This chapter intends to put the data and literature into conversation to demonstrate how the Cuban Educational System relegates Blackness to a cultural past excluding it from contemporary vision of Cuban modernity.

In her book *Cuban Youth & Revolutionary Values*, Denise Blum describes the relationship between socio-religious values and socialistic tendencies in the formation of the nation by referencing what she refers to as a political religion. She notes that many Cuban politicians and even educators have developed devoutness to the cause of the Revolution that is similar to that of a faithful Catholic. It is this transition from religious thought to rational thought that was deeply embedded into the national discourse of the Revolution where the political religion is most evident.

Denise Blum claims that the political religion of the Revolution which is inculcated through the school system, media, literature and other pedagogical forms which draw on a Manichean conceptual framework, which stigmatizes a perceived enemy in order to unify Cubans behind a sense of nationhood that constitutes both anti-imperialistic and

anti-capitalistic attitudes. She asserts that this message is a political strategy that is both accessible and utilized to mobilize and rally the masses to evoke the same sense of passion as demonstrated by the state on an international level (Blum 32). Sylvia Wynter, a Jamaican novelist and postcolonial theorist, identifies the very same transition, or what could be referred to as, the displacement of the religious episteme as the root of varying mechanisms of domination. In the process of secularization, these set of ideals no longer considered man as a subject of the church, but now the political subject of the state. Based on Wynter's critique of colonial logic the reinforcement of a racialized class society was both created and justified by the displacement of a God center universe and cosmology to be replaced by the modern, rational, and secular man, or in the case of Revolutionary Cuba, The New Man. This rational man still abides by the very same dichotomy but is now determining a different set of binaries for those who do and do not conform to this paradigm, which are revolutionary ideals.

This results in the formation of what was once a theocentric position of Otherness to a secular slot of Otherness, which is foundational to modernity. These dominant constructions of national identity are maintained by institutions and my research focuses on how these are embedded in the language of education. At several points in history, African religions were once considered brujeria. Christine Ayorinde states in her book *Afro-Cuban Religiosity, Religion and National Identity* that the government has worked to fully incorporate Blackness/ African identity into Cuban identity by considering Santeria to be one of Cuba's national religions however she draws the parallel between Cuba and the US by stating that to identify as "Cuban" almost means to identify as white. Those wish to assume an ethnic identity over a

national one to emphasize their Blackness are considered racist, divisive, and unpatriotic (Ayorinde 192).

Although the rhetoric and language of the curriculum of the Cuban education systems works to collectivizes its citizens, the underlying tones are still inherently Eurocentric. While socialist institutions prioritize human life and the collective wellbeing over capital and property, in many ways it ultimately still embodies and promotes a political religion that still works to stigmatize the ideologies of a perceived enemy or other. This is not to say that the both political and economic implications of US aggressions are not real, however, the polarizing nature of what Denise Blum refers to as the Manichean myth dichotomizes, or creates a binary by establishing who is a “Nuevo hombre” and who is not, who is a revolutionary being and who is not, in order to further the violence of the colonial project. (Blum 16). According to Marimba Ani, an anthropologist and African studies scholar, in her book *Yurugu*, argues that dichotomization, or the separation of the self from the other, is what she refers to as “utamawazo, or a culturally structured thought, is utilized to expand dominance. She states, “The process of dichotomization in the European utamawazo [...] is this dichotomized perception of reality on which the controlling presence (imperialistic behavior) depends. The utamaroho, which needs to control, is dependent on the antagonistic opposition presented by the cognitive style of the cultural myth”(Ani 33). In other words, hegemonic groups create these ideological norms in order impose monolithic forms of national identity. My assertion is that there is two systems at play here. On an international level, the language of this political religion otherizes those who are in opposition to the Castros/ Cuban economic model and domestically, it reinforces

this same dichotomy toward those who are considered dissident or counter revolutionary by asserting their autonomy or seeking to empower their own race within.

Where do we find this in contemporary school systems in Cuba?

In one interview I conducted with a prominent Afro-Cuban rapper named Roberto, hailing from the city of Santiago de Cuba, he discusses both his experiences as a rapper and as a student. Roberto is the child of two educators: his mother is a high school teacher and his father is a college professor. A firm believer in the power of hip hop as a tool of expression and an accessible way to transmit knowledge, this Hip Hop pedagogist thoroughly underlined that students are taught that there is no racism in Cuba. He was taught that because it is possible for people of different complexions to attain the same job that all Cubans are equal. Roberto is particularly passionate about the topic of education and race because he feels that he has been a person that has been discriminated against. A couple years ago, Roberto was a college student and was forced to decide between going to school and cutting his dread. He chose to keep his dreads. This was not the first time that I had heard about discrimination against Black hair textures in schools but I had also heard about it happening in the tourist industry as well.

Roberto is a man with a strong sense of self and a profound understanding of his African roots but this was not due to the school system. This was an understanding that was developed at home and in his community through various Yoruba cultural and religious practices he grew up in. Roberto had just recently moved to Havana in pursuit of a better job. Roberto was adamant about the fact that the Afro-Cuban religions are

one of the driving forces behind Black pride and racial consciousness and that in the face of decades of repression has been so tactfully preserved.

Santeria is an Afro-Cuban religion deriving from the customs of the Yoruba people from what is today's Benin and Nigeria. Originally practiced in secret, Santeria had to fuse many of its deities with Catholic saints in order to be able to be practiced. Though many refer to this as a form of socio-religious syncretism, Tobi, an organizer and art teacher from El Callejon de Hamel in Havana, strongly disagrees with this narrative claiming that syncretism is a voluntary and consensual hybrid or amalgamation of two religions. However, the adoption of Catholic saints by Santeria followers was a forced and violent form of assimilation that has only resulted in erasure, folklorization, and stigmatization of people and groups that continue to practice these religions.

The contemporary manifestation of this repression is evident in the strict control of these practices. In order to have any form of a religious ceremony, one must notify the government in order to obtain permission, otherwise they run the risk of having the ceremony shut down. If you have been to Cuba, you know that it is not unlikely to see people dressed all in white, such clothing indicates that this particular person is going through a Santeria initiation. For some families this initiation is happening to children at an early age, which would require them to wear all white for an extended period of time however, with a strict uniform policy families are forced to continue their practice outside of the confines of school. Cuban schools systems are considered to be religion free but Roberto claims that it was not until recently that regulations on uniforms for people from varying religious groups have been more flexible. Though the all white religious garment

of Santeria was not particularly visible when I observed a class a local elementary school where I was staying, I did see a few students wearing religious jewelry. Perhaps it is arguable that this is not a direct form of anti-blackness because there are many different religious groups that are also fight for recognition and religious freedom within Cuban institutions or because the adherence to this religion is no longer an exclusively Black practice but my argument speaks to the larger structure in place that create circumstance in which marginalized groups have to fight for visibility.

The Ministry of Education in Cuba utilizes an online platform entitled CubaEduca that works to create interactive lesson plans based on the history curriculums provided by the state. Neither the history curriculum nor the provided resources make any mention to the value and importance of Afro-Cuban religions as a key component to the cultural identity of the nation. Much like history textbooks in the US, the story of Afro-Cuban people begins with their forced arrival on to the island during the years of colonization. The ways in which Black narratives are incorporated after this point is merely in reference to how the inhumane institution of slavery contributed to the economic and political evolution and development of Cuba and how a few figures contributed to the liberation of the nation during the independence wars. However, there is no direct mention to Afro-Cuban religion pre or post revolution or forms of religious repression. (While in Cuba, I tried to find a history textbook to conduct a discourse analysis however they either did not use textbooks at the school I observed or I was not allowed to see them). Christine Ayorinde identifies that while religiosity is central to Cubanidad, Blackness and Afro-Cubans and their cultural forms exist both outside and within it. Whether subsumed under the language of mestizaje or utilized as a

discriminatory factor, Cuba's evolving and contradictory relationship to Afro-Cuban religions highlights that the government and its institutions have consistently deemed these religious practices as "anti modern"(p. 6). Ayorinde notes in her article " Afro-Cuban Religion As Resistance" references Jose Varona, a writer who also created educational reform under the first US invasion he stated:

"A los blancos de Cuba, por componer las clases dirigentes, les importa atraer a los negros las normas rectoras de la cultural occidental: a su indumentaria, a sus bailes, a sus teatro, a su música: les importa acercarlos tanto al conocimiento científico de la las leyes naturales como ojearlos"(Ayorinde 20).

Though this statement was written in 1898, these are some of the prevailing ideas that are visible in both policy and curriculum. The Revolutionary initiative, in attempts to create a national cultural homogeneity through education, had to decipher which form of subaltern knowledge or culture to keep and which to eradicate(Ayorinde 90). Che Guevara is not incorrect when he stated, "education and economic development are constantly interacting and fully shaping themselves"(Turner 133). Ayorinde argues that many white Cubans have suffered from an inferiority complex both from the legacy of Spanish colonial rule US occupation resulting in the consolidation of neocolonial systems that resulted in the white perception of Afro-Cubans and their culture as inferior, further exacerbating domestic racism (p. 20). This also resulted in further stigmatization of Afro-Cuban religions because in an attempt to assert sovereignty on

an international level both civilization and modernity became key tenets in the formation of Cubanidad.

The formation of modernity in contemporary Cuba is also visible in some of the language of these resources that detail the history of colonization of Cuba. Based on a discourse analysis I conducted on different educational resources provided through CubaEduca, it became very apparent what is considered to be normative notions of progress and modernity. Cuba's portrayal of the first contact between the Tainos, who inhabited the land, and Europeans provides insight into what are the notions of modernity that the state is seeking to instill. The Tainos are frequently referred to as "primitive" while the colonizers are stated to have "discovered" the island and at one point even referred to as "the modern European" man. While the physical descriptions of the perceived traits of the recolectoras- cazadoras-pescadoras ascribe to the language of scientific racism, this particular chapter on the Aboriginal Communities of Cuba asks students to synthesize why one would qualify los preagroalfareros to be less developed and to compare the superiority of the Tainos compared to the recolectoras-cazadoras-pescadoras. The answer to this question is rooted in the linear, material, and technological differences of each group, equating those who have come closer to the technological advancements that make production and extraction easier are deemed "superior" or "more advanced". Rather than valorizing each group for their own natural qualities and ways of sustenance, the discourse of this activity reflects the western imaginary of vertical and extractive relationships as it relates to the land while attempting to reinforce that this evaluation of superiority is within the framework of the "primitive community". To take this a bit further, by what standard is this activity asking

students to evaluate the superiority of culture of two aboriginal groups? Why is this discourse analysis of any significance when the theme has been about contextualizing Black narratives and representation? Well, going back to an earlier argument I presented, that the language and ideology that also works to exclude Blackness from narratives of contemporary and revolutionary Cubanidad are the same mechanisms and dichotomized standards that seek to evaluate the superiority of various indigenous groups. These standards evaluate and vilifies narratives they see fit to further a certain political project. Argumentation on neocolonial systems perpetuating the same exclusionary practices of their former oppressors are not new, however, my intervention seeks to use education as a lens to analyze a nation whose rhetoric rejects the dominant nature of colonialism. This can be seen in the absence of the story of El Partido Independiente de Color from Cuban History curriculum.

Many Black writers like Roberto Zurbarano and Esteban Morales have vehemently called out the Cuban state for intentionally leaving out such an important and controversial story but the following paragraph works to unpack the impact of invisibility. The story of El Partido Independiente de Color typifies the relationship between Black political activism and the state because it represents a long history of repression. Black politics or notions of liberations have always been considered a threat to both the status quo and the harmony of a racial democracy, and this is not just unique to Cuba. The definition of Cubanidad that is integrated with, or incorporates Blackness, is in direct opposition to historical narratives that indicate that assertions for Black sovereignty have always been deemed dangerous.

El Partido Independiente de Color (PIC) was a political party that was created in 1908 and made up of mostly of Cubans of African descent who participated in the Cuban Independence War. Aligned outside of the political binary of the Republican and Liberal parties of the time, the objective of the PIC was to create networks and institutions that sought to empower and strengthen both the economic and political participation of people of color in Cuba. Additionally, the PIC believed that the first step to equality and combatting the social exclusion and marginality of Afro-Cuban people was to first recognize that racial discrimination does exist and that it is necessary to unpack the myth of racial harmony and seek out various strategies to eradicate structural and ideological racism and discrimination. In an attempt to create Black solidarity on the island and provide an alternative to the mainstream political discourse, the group was virtually dismantled under the Morua Amendment on the basis that no political party can solely congregate on the premise of race. The demise of the party culminated in what is referred to as the War of 1912 where an armed conflict took place in a fiery exchange between Afro-Cuban rebels associated with the PIC and the Cuban government with the support of the US (Eastman). The uprising was swiftly put down and resulted in the death of an estimation of 2,000 Afro-Cuban people (Benson 2017).

In an interview with professor Martin Hernandez, he mentions that contemporary Cuban history education either doesn't thoroughly cover or makes no reference to El PIC or the War of 1912 in textbooks. This is something that is generally omitted from Cuban History. Why is this historic event of such importance? For the simple reason that a people can not begin to conceptualize racism or its roots without establishing a historical understanding of the relationship between Black people and the state.

Additionally, when certain histories are omitted from the collective and cultural memory of a nation, those past narratives no longer serve as a framework or strategy for contemporary movements or causes. The omission of this story from history textbooks only serves a collective amnesia of racial conflict, the very same memory that works to uphold the whitewashing narratives of mestizajes or universalist notions of Cubanidad that are threatened by understanding of complex racial identities. In a study conducted by Danielle Pillard(2017) on the components of Black identity and Black consciousness, one interviewer states that it wasn't until they listened to the music of Anónimo Consejo that they really discovered Black History in Cuba and the story of the PIC. The interviewee admits that this understanding and reading of Aline Helg's *Our Rightful Share: Afro-Cuban Struggles for Equality 1886-1912* allowed them to identify with the movement and resonate with the struggles of Afro-Cubans, like himself(Pillard 105). Pillard suggests that if the curriculum were to include literature that details Black history there would a profound impact on Black political and racial attitudes in Cuba (105).

Professor Esteban Morales from the University of Havana has been one of Cuba's biggest advocates for a more inclusive curriculum that reflects the racial complexities of the nation. While Morales recognizes that their economic and structural issues at play that allow students in different parts of the city to experience a different caliber of education, that don't explicitly exclude Black and mestizo students from the classroom, he states that Cuban curriculum is characterized by a "full blown Occidentalism" that doesn't portray an in depth history of Africa or Asia (Morales 26). While this point is arguably remnants of colonialism and families maintaining the same

homes after the Revolution, the topic of race is avoided in both the history and science classroom, sounding quite reminiscent of my interview with Professor Hernandez.

Hernandez argues that if students were taught that race isn't biological and people's phenotype does not dictate individual behaviors and characteristics, it would provide students with the socio-historical understanding of how race has been used a tool of domination.

Professor Hernandez is a writer and literary critic with an in depth understanding of Cuban history. While his writing hasn't focused much on primary or secondary education, in the interview, Hernandez described the ideological and structural shifts in Cuba in the 60s once it got involved with the Soviet Union. He stated:

The first ten years of the Revolution were quite open. There was a lot of historical literature written by people from varying political tendencies. However after the 1st decade of the Revolution, with the death of Che, the founding of the Communist party, all debates were over. Everything becomes much more uniform and vertical. The socialist system with Soviet influence becomes much more defined and to an extent, Cuba loses the pluralism and inclusion that was once apart of the political discourse. The educational discourse became defined by the national political discourse. Lesson plans began to lose their richness because they were over politicized and began to overtly express ideas of the Patria, Revolution, and faith in Fidel. I remember as a student the teacher used to ask us, 'What was there before 1959?' and we would answer with the three magic words "Hunger, Misery, and Exploitation' and then the teacher would ask 'what about now?' and we would say, 'There's no hunger, misery, or exploitation'

Hernandez' recollection of his experience in the school system is quite telling because it speaks to the centrality and vertical nature of the school system. The intention of reform was to provide the same education to students in the city as the ones in the countryside but top down and centralized education simply disperses ideas of what the metropol decides is the national culture rather than a curriculum that

incorporates and works to construct culture that includes local realities. There are also parallels between Hernandez' account of the school system and Tobi's thoughts on tension between western religions and African religions in Cuba. Hernandez went on to say (and this will be explored in the next chapter) that horizontally structured, political and educational practices that derive from the community are deemed to be dissident and in opposition to the Revolution. Tobi expressed that during the colonial period, part of the stigma around African religions derived from European misconception and uneasiness with decentralized and horizontal practices. Because, structurally practices do not fit into the hierarchical paradigms both in religion and educational institutions, they now occupy the space of the designated Other.

Esteban Morales states that this lack of representation in curriculum creates a major disconnect from what is taught in schools to the actual Cuban reality and if there is to be any changes made, it needs to start in the schools (p.25). This disconnect between the schools curriculum and social reality is of major importance in terms of contextualizing the lack of impact the school is having on transforming the lives of its students, particularly Afro-Cuban students. I conducted an interview with a principal from a local elementary school for students with special needs in Central Havana. The principal, Maria Martinez was so excited to show me her school. Principal Martinez introduced me to each one of the staff and they talked to me a little bit about their roles. I had the opportunity to meet some of the students. Maria was a very proud principal who had been an educator for over 20 years and has been in this position for four years now. The school staff was made up of predominantly woman of color, both dark skinned Black and mestiza. Based on my observation, the racial breakdown of the

school was quite diverse, both a mix of white, black and mestizo students. Maria explained that the school was a transitory school with a modified curriculum and smaller classroom sizes in order to better meet the needs of their students, who have a variety of disabilities and needs. While she frequently emphasized the amount of resources they received she also had mentioned that some of the students that struggle in school, or are at her school to deal with emotional trauma that manifests in various behavioral disorders and part of this stems from the home. When I asked Maria why some students have a more challenging home life than others and why some students have more resources at home than others, she simply responded that it was just simply the home culture that the parents have established. Although the school does have a lot of resources and the city provides many services like at home visits, tailored support, and one to one aids. When analyzing Maria's interview with a critical lens, it is quite apparent that the varying home lives of the students is an indicator of class difference, something Maria and other educators I have interviewed, that are not also community organizers or popular educators, refuse to acknowledge. How is it that the principal of the school lacks a sociopolitical understanding of the community that she serves? How is that this disconnect is not just visible in terms of the curriculum but the people who work within the system?

In an article entitled, *Education in Cuba: Socialism and the Encroachment of Capitalism*, Curry Mallot takes on a critical approach as he explores the strengths and weaknesses of the legacy of the Revolution, how it fits in a global neoliberal context and the role of education. While he provides a balanced analysis of the of the school system, identifying that Cuba has some of the best teacher preparation programs and

has one of the highest rates of gdp fund allocation toward education, he does acknowledge that Cuban education is in part responsible for reproducing the labor power that sustains the nation (Mallot 228). He argues that the Cuban education system works to naturalize external control of labor through instructing a set of values that ultimately seeks to thwart the desire for private industry and benefit the cause of the Revolution, in the dominance of state power (239). Mallot draws on policies of compulsory education that not only diminish creativity but also are also deeply unnatural to the human spirit, that is inherently resistant to all forms of external control. While Cubans are aware that privatization is not the answer to their material needs because the capitalist system would not uphold the social welfare state that has been created, many people like the radical popular educators do hope to explore ways in which they can reassert control of their own labor, lives and realities.

Of course, Principal Maria is just one woman who is a seemingly dedicated educator and she does not represent the attitudes, understandings, and views of all educators who work within the school system. Despite this fact, her story reflects much larger systemic gap. In the wise words of Sonia Ortega, a radical popular educator I interviewed, "At a school, you might be going consistently but you don't believe in the curriculum you are doing. You're only going to learn what the teacher wants to teach you. These things are very detached from you. These things [curriculum] don't contribute to your own intellectual or vocational development. You are going to feel like an object. You are only receiving and repeating". This message is a critique of the student teacher dynamic that projects information that doesn't resonate with the hearts of the students. Her words speak to the reality of contemporary Cuban society that in

many ways seeks to incorporate Blackness/ Africanness into the Cuban tradition and culture, while simultaneously excluding it from the official discourse which is disseminated through the school systems. Afro-Cuban culture is a part of popular discourse but perhaps not formally recognized as much as it should be in the classroom. On both a micro and macro level the disconnect from the realities of students reflects systemic issues that, whether intentional or not, exclude or misportray Black narratives that ultimately hinder the social and economic mobility of Afro-Cuban people. The reality is that there is profound comfort in the culture of silence. When restricting and limiting the national discourse to a hollow mestizaje or racial harmony, it greatly deters the possibility for a profound reflection or national coming to terms with the violent history of a colonial past. The Revolution represented a new era that should have started a reconciling of racism and discrimination that went beyond the attempts made post Revolution. A truly Revolutionary act is self-criticism and finding discomfort in the past to shape and in form both a collective dialogue and healing in order to guide to bring about a national progress that understandings Cuba's complex racial identity.

Chapter 4: Black Organizing & Racial Consciousness

The world around us is so big. Sometimes it's hard to envision life outside of our own neighborhood. We think about it sometimes, what it looks like for others that share commonalities with our own lives but we're all so busy. It's hard to even recognize that we are all affected by the same problems.

How do you envision your community? This was the question that Jose, a community organizer from Marianao, posed to a group during one of his workshops that he was doing for the kids in his community. If you could make it better, what would you do? What would it look like? This practice of re-imagining our world and our spaces as if we had the power to manifest real change is how we begin to recognize that we are capable of wanting or deserving of change. Linda Tuwai Smith, in her book *Decolonizing Methodologies*, taught us that Envisioning is one of the strategies employed that binds people together and allows us to rise above our circumstances and dare to consider the possibilities of a different reality. She says that this is a key tenet of survivance (Smith 254).

Blackness as it exists in Cuba is different than how it presents itself in other national contexts but where it is located in Cuban culture varies based on who you ask. What is undeniable among those who have dared to envision a reality outside of what has been imposed upon them know that their African heritage and culture, is a source of survivance. It has survived because it has resisted. The efforts of the people and

organizations I observed are rooted in Black liberation but they are also efforts that encompass a fight for all subalternity and marginalized folk in the fight for space and recognition, but specifically a fight against racism and machismo. Survivance is a term that comes from Native American Studies in a North American context but it is fitting here. It is defined as the need to exist as you are with the recognition that what you are is impossible to conceal, nor would you want to conceal it. Survivance is understanding the complicated reality of what it means to be you, both naturally and how you are defined based on forces that have been imposed upon you. In this process, you arrive at an understanding of yourself and allow yourself the space, vulnerability, and fragility to learn and unlearn “in this articulation and displacement”(Dion & Salamanca 161)

This is the way in which I chose to analyze the stories that were shared with me. This is the framework or methodology I feel fits the narratives I am portraying because this is how they were described to me. I am not Cuban but I feel deeply connected to the work being done in the neighborhoods I visited and the inspirations of the educators who shared their experiences with me. It is my hope that concept of re-imagining or envisioning frames the ultimate questions that I hoping to address in this chapter which is: When confronted with social and economic exclusion, what are the ways in which communities collectively work toward seeking recognition, asserting their autonomy, and empowering themselves? How is popular education and community organizing, with the intentions of raising racial consciousness, an agent of change? How do the objectives and general structuring of pedagogy differ from that of exclusionary and hierarchical institutions?

To be Black in Havana is to be both visible and invisible, recognized and unrecognized at the same time. There is no way to approach understanding race in a Caribbean context with a mentality of binaries because it doesn't work that way. A Cuban educator once told that there are over 50 ways to say Black in the Caribbean and in Cuba there are over 30. Nuance has to be the logic with which we approach the topic of Black political organizing and community work or else we will fail to understand the objectives of these efforts because they are layered. Melina Pappedemos, in her book *Black Political Activism and the Cuban Republic*, traces the history the history of racial politics and the culture of Black activism from 1902-1958. She establishes that Black activism can not be contained within a nationalist paradigm, meaning that activists were not limited by the discourses of racial harmony, racelessness, or a prioritization national identity and that their ideologies moved beyond these narratives in pursuit of access and resources. The former limitations subsumed Black participation in the name of egalitarianism but never fully included Black people into the national community (Pappemos 230). While she argues that social clubs, organizations, and other forms of Black activism did not fully embrace racial consciousness over national identity, I argue that the examples and narratives of the people in my case study speak to larger issues that exemplify a contemporary and visible orientation further toward embracing a racial consciousness as an entry point to visibilizing other forms of marginalized identities through community schooling or radical popular education. This is not to say that the groups I have interviewed are political monoliths. They all have different tendencies and objectives but seemingly, their end goal is to uplift their community through different

pedagogical mediums that work to improve racial consciousness and unlearn harmful practices that hinder growth and mobility for Afro-Cubans.

Whether the state will recognize it or not, there are racial disparities between Cubans of color and white Cubans. People from all walks of life have demanded that there needs to be new ways for Cuba to combat racism other than pretending it is not there. In the article “ Cuba Requiere Actualizar Luchas contra Nuevas Formas del Racismo”, activists urge the state to improve the ways in which data is collected about Afro-Cuban people in order to truly understand and legitimize the inequities that smaller studies have validated and Afro-Cubans already know exist. The activists interviewed in this article argue that in order to see real transformation, racism and discrimination must be confronted and addressed at an early age in the school systems (Gonzalez). There needs to be a shift in consciousness. Professor Esteban Morales states, “It is not possible to carry out the tasks of the struggle against racism. The exploiting classes in Cuba have always worked very hard so that simple, superficial physical differences could be projected for the purpose of keeping us divided from a classist and racial point of view, and thus keeping us easily exploitable”(Morales 86). So if combatting racism and raising racial consciousness is one of the key tenets of liberation for a very large part of the Cuban population, will the school system work to incorporate an anti-racist curriculum? The answer is maybe, but in the mean time Black radical popular educators have taken it upon themselves to assert their ability to uplift one another and their community and collectively empower through schooling that provides alternative schools of thought toward race, gender, and class that combat notions that are being perpetuated by an antiquated school system.

Angela Davis was once quoted saying, “Radical simply means grasping things at the root”. It’s an attempt at addressing a conflict at its origins rather than addressing the quick temporary, and shortsighted dilemmas that stem from a systemic issue. Cedric Robinson’s interpretation of the tradition of Black radicalism is that it can not be understood from its “*genesis*” (the involuntary and violent extraction and arrival of African people to the Americas & slavery) but rather it should be viewed as “African response to an oppression emergent from the immediate determinants of European development in the modern era and framed by orders of human exploitation woven into the interstices of European social life”(Robinson 73). In other words, Black resistance or radicalism are forms of survival in violent systems that would otherwise erase or exploit their existence in the name of modernity.

Most of the contemporary research on Black activism in Cuba explores how Hip Hop has been utilized as a tool to express political resistance, specifically after the Special Period. Underground Hip Hop in Cuba has transformed into a powerful medium that has been used to inform Cuban people on their history and local and global political problems. It is what Paul Gilroy would define as a counterculture to Western modernity (qtd. in Saunders 43). Though at times the music has been censored, the explicit lyrics, style, and general aesthetic has served as a source of Black pride for many Afro-Cubans. In the article “Black Thought, Black Activism: Cuban Underground Hip-hop and Afro-Latino Countercultures of Modernity”, Tanya Saunders seeks to explore the explicit anti-colonial and anti-capitalist discourse of Cuban Hip Hop. She establishes that in some ways it parallels national discourse only differing in terms of how it expands on anti-racist notions by helping Afro-Cubans recognize their African roots, struggle, and naming the

oppressions faced by the Diaspora in Western democracies. However, Ronni Armstead's provides an exclusive look into a different form of Cuban underground Hip Hop but from a Black Radical Feminist perspective, which is visible in the work of the queer and vegan rap duo, Krudas Cubensi. This thesis mirrors the political discourse that are visible in the lyrics of the music of Krudas Cubensi, as mostly of the organizers I interview are queer Black women and men with similar critiques. This case study incorporates ethnographic data from Cuban Hip Hop spaces and activists that take on a more intersectional approach to Black liberation but my research primarily focuses on smaller informal examples of community schooling. The venues, the sizes of the spaces, as do the structuring of these forms of schooling differ but they have a profound impact on their communities. The following sections are organized by key figures I interviewed who provided insight into their realities, objectives, and motives as community organizers.

The Alfabetizadora of Human Rights & Social Justice

One of the first people I interviewed when I arrived in Havana was Teresa Alvarez. Teresa is an educator, psychologist, researcher, and activist. Originally from Santiago de Cuba, Teresa left her city for the first time in her life to become one of the original brigadista women who were part of the National Literacy Campaign. When I first met her she was presiding over a research section entitled " Gender, Identities, and Diversity in Social Communication". This section explores all forms of identities and various forms of discrimination but specifically how it appears in different forms of

media. Her role in this position is to create workshops for people in her community based off of research she has been doing. Teresa is the self-proclaimed “connection” person of Central Havana. She is the go to person for both people in the community who are trying to create a work shop or an event and she is also an important reference in the community because of her connections to people and various organization in Havana for researchers or students from the outside that are looking to expand their understanding activism in Havana. Though Teresa has started various associations and foundations in the city of Havana she frequently works in coalitions or works to stay connected with other Black and LGBTQI+ organizations. Here is an excerpt on how she describes her current work and what motivates her in relation to her past as a brigadista:

To leave my home to take on this role of teaching another person meant to participate in something so beautiful It [the experience of being a brigadista] is something you carry with you the rest of your life. Today, I still feel like I did then. I still feel like an alfabetizadora. It is a form of transformation- changing the subjectivity of a person. Discussing racial discrimination or sexual abuse or homophobia are very difficult topics. In order to change, you must change your mind. When I sit and think about my past, it's like I'm in the same position of an alfabetizadora but of social issues. What I do is a form of making someone literate by opening them up to different ideas and changing their ideology. I teach to value human life, respect for others, and respect for diversity.

While Teresa defends the values and intentions of the Revolution, she recognizes that their needs to be a dismantling of the remnants of patriarchy that perpetuates notions of machismo, homophobia, transphobia and sexism, but there also needs to be a shift of consciousness of the people to embrace this form of change. Teresa is an adjunct professor for the University of Havana and though she understands the disparities of Afro-Cubans at the university level she is not as familiar with how they manifest in secondary and primary education. Nonetheless, she acknowledges that TV and media

is one the biggest pedagogical mediums in the world today and the lack of representation of both Black bodies and non normative bodies contributes to both the societal misconceptions of marginalized people and their over all self worth and visibility.

The parallel that Teresa draws between her role as a brigadista and what she does now as a community worker is quite interesting because, while my thesis seeks to contrast the difference between traditional public education and community schooling spaces, her analysis speaks to the informality of the Nationality Literacy Campaign. While the campaign was a state driven initiative, the informal process in which literacy workers were going into people's homes and conducting classes in small groups can be interpreted as a form of community schooling. Additionally, most of literacy workers were teachers and students from the city and this experience was an opportunity for them to learn about the realities of Cubans who live in poorer and more rural communities. In other words, like the community schooling, it is mutually liberating and beneficial experience. Both are rooted in the ideals of Freire but the Literacy campaign took on a more explicit political stance by using Revolutionary ideals to teach. This maybe the inherent difference in the two spaces, is that radical community educating is much more localized but based on the subjective experience of the participants. The community schooling in Marianao for racial consciousness encourages the people participating to incorporate their own lives, worries, and concerns. In this form there is no curriculum, no agenda, or plan. Community schooling does not seek to quantify outcomes or seek to modernize their community, they simply want to uplift their community in the ways their community wants to be uplifted. The objective to raise

racial consciousness differs from inculcating with revolutionary, anti-imperialist, and anti-capitalist values because while racial consciousness does imply a resistance to oppressive forces that have work to erase racial identity, it doesn't identify one group as an "other" the way a Manichean scheme does. It identifies a pattern or a system that operates to invisibilize or erode what naturally exist. Racial consciousness demarcates a return to the valorization of what a system of oppression has taken away. There is much less of an imposition, which is partially implied in the National Literacy Campaign.

Teresa's experiences and dedication to human right through activism is just one example of the many efforts to improve the quality of life of the people in her community. Teresa identifies as a lesbian and it is evident that she has always been an ally and advocate for her community and people just like her. While her efforts demand equality for all, her initiatives are tailored to those who have been excluded from national narratives.

My African Rhythm, My Way of Being Matters

Another interview I conducted was with Luisa Herrera. Luisa is a dark skin Black woman who identifies as a lesbian. Both her and her partner Elena are local artist from Marianao, a predominantly Black community that is a part of Havana. Luisa is a vibrant person and told me she always involved in a number of different projects. She prides herself in being a self-sustained artist who is not beholden to one job while also reminding me that the life of an artist is never easy. Luisa cares deeply about her community. As I arrived at her house she was sweeping her porch talking to one of her

neighbors while another neighbor was coming out to drop off a gas tank for her stove. Even as we were doing our interviews people were coming in and out and greeting her. She apologized but told me this was very normal for her house. She refers to her space as The Community House. I asked Luisa to share her thoughts on her experience in the education system, how it relates to her philosophy, and the work she does. This was her response:

“ My generation is called “ The Generation of Frustration” because we devoted ourselves to an education system that was a battle for the nation. It was the dream of the nation but not so much for us as individuals. We dedicated ourselves to collective work both in the city and in rural areas. The emphasis of the state initiative was to focus on the collective well being. The point of view of the education system is very rigid. We hardly ever learn about Black philosophy. It’s not incorporated into the curriculum. We are almost always taught from a white, European perspective and with that form of thought is where machismo, sexism, and homophobia derives. These notions were born out of the colonial era. It was perpetuated through Catholicism but ultimately these are Eurocentric dogmas that uphold patriarchy”.

This is the ideological base that informs Luisa’s community work. But what does she do? As I mentioned in the anecdote in the introduction, Luisa utilizes her home as communal space for the people in her neighborhood. Sometimes she uses her home as a gallery to promote the art of unrecognized Afro-Cuban artists and other times, it is an art studio when she offers art workshops to children in neighborhood. One of her objectives is to demonstrate the influence of Africa and the diaspora through creating art and curating events. Her hope is that viewers who come to her space feel recognized and resonate with the images because in so many places Black people are not visible. Luisa also holds collective community dinners, that are almost like a potluck. These dinners are always filled with music, spoken word, and dance. Here people exchange about their lives and concerns and learn through one another’s shared experiences in a space they feel comfortable and heard. Luisa revamped her home as an honor to her

mother and dedicated it to using her space as a place for dialogue, reflection, inclusion, diversity, but importantly of love.

Before we concluded in the interview, I asked Luisa what she thought was necessary to see definitive change not just in her community but also in Cuban society as a whole. Luisa stated that people have to begin to “decolonize” themselves and to do so by seeking out Black literature of the Diaspora to inform new ways of thinking about the world, to provide an alternative vision, and to develop a better understanding of Black power. This is how people become autonomous, independent, and self-sufficient. She believes a collective awakening, as a community, will give space and power for people to be heard and recognized. She told me quite confidentially, “ ..porque vale mi manera de hablar, vale mi manera de pensar, y vale mi manera de vivir”.

Luisa’s powerful message calls on Afro-Cuban people to pursue other forms of knowledge and create knowledge outside of what it taught in the school systems. It encourages a curiosity to learn about your roots and to explore literature and people that have a different way of perceiving the world, a perception of the world that doesn’t work in opposition to who they are, a perception of the world that validates them and their history and struggle. Luisa passion demonstrates that once a person begins to allow themselves the space to be vulnerable and learn to unlearn, that they begin to recognize that they are important, worthy, and valued. Her ideology is indicative of a horizontal and collective process that both seeks validations and recognition from community while validating and recognizing the humanity of others. In a nation whose institutions promote notions of a cultural homogeneity, at times at the expense of Blackness, Luisa reaffirms that Afro-Cuban people don’t have to take on practices or

tendencies of a dominant culture that differ from who they are naturally. They are beautiful just the way they choose to be.

This form of schooling differs from that of the school system. The different forms of knowledge productions blur the lines between teacher and student. Luisa is developing a practice that is a mutually liberatory experience creating a sort of feedback loop where participants are both creators and receivers at the same time. Luisa is a highly educated woman and very well read but she does not intend to teach, she merely intends to share. Her words on the reclaiming of power and language are the essence of radical popular education. They are reminiscent of bell hooks' words *Teaching to Transgress* where she says, " The power of speech is not simply that it enables resistance to white supremacy but that it also forges a space for alternative cultural production and alternative epistemologies- different ways of thinking and knowing that were crucial to creating a counter hegemonic world view"(hooks 129). The ability for Luisa and her community to start the practice of their own culture and knowledge production within the walls of the Community House are important steps in what bell hooks would identify as using education as a tool for freedom. The next interview I will analyze digs deeper into understanding the process of theory, praxis, and reflection as key components to Cuban Popular Education.

The Disconnect and Inaction

Although I interviewed nearly 9 community organizers, I really wanted to draw attention to the importance of my conversation with Sonia Ortega, because her love, passion, and energy for her community is unparalleled and I was quite moved by her

dedication toward uplifting others through art. Sonia is an art curator who organizes events and also promotes the work of young and unrecognized Afro-Cuban artists, particularly those work in plastic art. Typically, the events and workshops she puts on are not within an institution but supported by them. She considers this work to be a tribute to the Black community and other marginalized groups. Sonia identifies herself as a Popular Educator in her community and is adamant about the fact that the foundation of her work, both her political and teaching philosophy, is inspired by theories of critical pedagogy outlined Brazilian intellect Paulo Freire. The objective of her work is to create a space and opportunities for her community to feel empowered, to participate in community development and to re-imagine and create new sustainable economic forms. We spent a great deal of time discussing the main two tenet of critical pedagogy that in form her teaching style and reflective processes which are: theory and praxis.

Paulo Freire was a Brazilian educator and philosopher who was widely know for his work adult literacy education among the poor, illiterate working class in rural parts of Brazil. Freire is highly critical of the banking system, which is a hierarchical, authoritarian, and one side educational practice typically utilized in institutions and education systems. He regards them as a form of schooling that merely works to replicate oppressive structures and the injustice of contemporary society. In his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* he states that, "Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it. Those truly committed to the cause of liberation can accept neither the mechanistic concept of consciousness as an empty vessel to be filled, nor the use of banking methods of

domination (propaganda, slogans—deposits) in the name of liberation”(Freire 79). In other terms, in order to achieve true liberation one must be capable of dialogue, not only with others but with themselves in order to be receptive of new concepts that they are willing to apply. The act of rejecting the banking method is the first step toward arriving a more mutually liberatory exchange between participants.

Sonia has an in depth understanding of critical pedagogy which informs her teaching philosophy. Before she shared with me the numerous examples of her workshops and community events, I asked her how are the workshops structured and how she would describe them. Sonia confidently responded:

“It [teaching/ class] is done with consent, thoughts, and actions to promote humane values and the empowerment of society by exercising the right to break from the power of patriarchy and anything that promotes social discrimination and marginalization. It fights for the empowerment of women...The point is to have a united group not just learn but to unlearn hegemonic ideas...The foundation of popular education is that it is subjective, not objective. It is not to diminish or play down the social construction of the person (relativizar), but so that this person has their own voice, ability, way of viewing the thinking, and acting”

Sonia is active in her community in a number of different ways. Sonia is proud of the fact that all of her events and work are outside of institutions but sometimes institutions like the MLK Center support them. In addition to creating her own art and promoting art, Sonia also offers art classes to women and children in her community. For example, she had referenced on particular workshop that was designed specifically for Black women. The workshop objectives were about Women’s empowerment and creating art. In the workshop, the women discussed machismo, the affects on woman, and how they can all work to dismantle it. After they had a dialogue, Sonia taught the women how to

create art through paper mache with the intent for it to be sold in the tourist industry. Not only is she providing a space where women can debrief and feel connected to one another but they are also creating economic opportunities for one another. Another example is a workshop that she does with teenage youth in her community where they look at different magazines and discuss if they feel represented in different forms of media, and she discusses with the kids different ways they would change media to see more people that look like themselves.

In the interview, Sonia identified that many of the youth in Cuba feel disconnected from both community and school. She recognizes that they the youth are not engaged in a way that they feel they have control over their own realities and that their thoughts matter. She describes what she believes to be a “choque” for when many youth graduate or finish school and realize the demands of life are different than what they have learned. Many of them are unprepared. This disconnect was previously identified in chapter 3 but in the context of popular education, it is a motivation to providing students and community members with the confidence they need to be well informed participants in their realities.

Her talleres are structured a bit different than a typical lesson plan you might witness at a school. Most of the time lessons and dialogue are created together and structured around the needs of the students. They pick the topic and decide on the ways in which they want to display the new knowledge they have created. Some groups or institutions seek Sonia out to give workshop on gender, sexuality, and identity. Sonia is also a part of a group that is called Elle, who identify as a Queer Black group of Cuban woman that work to create a project that is based on love, learning,

solidarity, empowerment, dialogue and community. This group puts on events that work to empower both people in their neighborhood but also other people that are Black and a part of the LGBTQI+ community by having workshops on gardening, vegan cooking, movie nights, and parties that feature music of Queer Black people of the Diaspora. This group also works in support of other groups that have similar events that work to raise racial consciousness and improve access to resources for Afro-Cuban people.

Sonia and I discussed at length the shortcoming of the school system. We both acknowledged that all education is inherently political and reflects national discourse and hegemonic ideas. It is Sonia's hope that in these practices, people in her community find their voices because she has found hers. When discussing what her talleres feels like she stated:

The fight against discrimination is tiring. You can get tired. Popular Education is an alternative that helps you take charge. It's like fasting. It's a cleaning and a return. The fight to confront these issues and be a part of the resistance project, every single day, you have to clean and take care of yourself to continue on. Depression, tiredness, fatigue, all happen very frequently. It happens because you are human. In my case, being a mother, a partner, and myself, it has been a space of revitalizing where I get together with people. I always try, although, it's hard, and unlearn what I know. You realize that every day you have to learn"

The sentiment of this quote parallels bell hooks idea of holistic pedagogy. The informality of the space disrupts traditional schooling norms where participants identify the teacher as a distant unknown figure who teaches them the content. Traditional school setting forces students to compartmentalize their lives and understanding of people. Popular education places an emphasis on the emotional and spiritual well being of its participants. Though in some instances Sonia might be facilitating the conversation, she still blurs the lines between facilitator and participant by sharing her own intimate and emotional feelings and by feeling wholly rejuvenated by the process

(hooks 16). It is this sense of vulnerability she hopes to evoke from her workshops. Sonia works really hard to create a space in which people feel comfortable and can feel vulnerable. These transformative practices are not easy and at times can be met with resistance but that means they are challenging peoples' ideas, however it is all in the name of growth, representation, and community unity.

Examples

The following section will detail some of the workshops and community initiatives that have also taken place in Marianao that operate with the same objective to raise racial consciousness.

1. The Black Hair Fair

The Black Hair Fair was a workshop put on by a group with the support of other Black organizations in Havana that worked to empower youth through making and designing dolls that actually reflect what the youth look like. This activity is a critique of the lack of Black dolls on the market that contribute to a misrepresentation of the Black community and Havana. The festival included workshop, art expositions, and discussions. This activity was utilized to instill a sense of pride in the youth. The activity the students are partaking in is quite powerful however it is quite evident that many of the students do not fully embrace their own complexion because as evident in the documentation of the film, which I was able to view in an interview, many brown skin or dark skin students were choosing lights skin or white dolls. The group that ran this event is made up of other Afro-Cuban artists, activists, and intellectuals. Their objectives

is rooted in cultural and collective resistance to coloniality through liberatory programs that activate their art, memory, and knowledge of Afro-Cuban youth..

2. The Diaspora Festival

This festival was a collaboration of various Black organizations from both Cuba and the Dominican Republic. This event included everything from forums and discussions, to music and performances, a fashion show of African designed clothes, and a segment on doing Black hair. This event was geared toward the recognition and empowerment of Black women by engaging in different useful activities and developing a sense of community.

3. The LGBTQI+ Documentary Association

This is a cinema club located in Havana that meets every couple of months to host films that feature protagonists of the LGBTQI+ community. While in Havana, I went to an event during the The Movie Fair where the club was featuring a documentary that sought to visibilize gay and lesbian couples of Havana to normalize gay and lesbian families. This event turned into a unique experience where I was able to observe a passionate discussion between the directors of the film who were mostly white and mestizo and the predominantly Black audience confront the directors on the lack of diversity in their film. Not only did the documentary barely feature any people of color, it utilized highly offensive tropes that stigmatize Afro-Cuban people. The conversation shifted to focus less on the development in the project and more toward the disgruntled people in the audience who began to criticize how irresponsible the documentary was in misportraying the Cuban reality. It became a discussion about what is

problematic and what is considered violent. The people in the audience viewed the director's utter lack of regard for the Black community as a violent act of whitening and erasure while reminding the directors of the real life consequences Afro-Cubans face and how pieces like these perpetuate and exacerbate racism.

Conclusion

This chapter highlights the philosophical and ideological premise of radical popular education among the Black community and organizing spaces in Marianao. The insight each organizer provides demonstrates the need for this form of community empowerment in which organizing spaces are required for survival through unity and rejuvenation through collective recognition and healing. Organizing spaces in Havana, though still operating within the national discourse of collectivity and unity, expand their understanding and praxis of Revolutionary values by working toward undoing the harmful affects of capitalism, colonialism, and white supremacy both on their communities and their bodies. They utilize racial consciousness and Black politics as a means to empower Black people in order to recognize their shared struggle and also as a point of departure to establish solidarity with other marginalized groups and identities. These groups and organizers have identified that an anti-racist stances are essential to the liberation of all and though their anti-capitalist stance draw them inward toward a defense of national identity, they are still critical of Cuba's institutions that perpetuate racist, sexist, and homophobic ideology. The objective is to both fill in the gaps left by the school system and unlearn the pieces that don't contribute to growth and healing.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This case study set out to understand what are the forms of Black representation in school systems in Havana and how do these political manifestations of imagined national identities interact with Blackness in curriculum, among the teaching staff, and in policy. Additionally, one of the objectives of this case study was to explore the philosophical and ideological premise of radical Black organizing and popular education and to learn the ways in which these spaces pedagogical differ from the school systems. By contrasting these two spaces, this thesis draws attention to both the motives and structural differences.

The contemporary Cuban Educational System was born out of the initiatives of the Revolution that sought out to create El Hombre Nuevo who was not motivated by individual and material desire of wealth accumulation but one who prioritizes the collective well being of others in the nation. The creation of El Hombre Nuevo entailed a sense of direction for the nation that led Cuba along a socialistic path of development and in spite a profound anti-imperialist and anti-capitalistic stance that also vowed to eradicate racism, the eventual culture of silence on the topic of race and the ideals of racial harmony, deterred further progress in the fight for equality. Despite the egalitarian rhetoric and policies put into place after the Revolution, universal policies and a lingering legacy of colonialism not only left Afro-Cubans in the margins but further exacerbated both social and economic inequality. According to radical schooling

theory that is referenced in Ann Ferguson's book *Bad Boys*, schools are a sorting mechanism that reinforce a "hidden curriculum" that reproduces social inequality and domination while valorizing only certain linguistic and cultural forms, particularly those of the cultural hegemony (Ferguson 50). While the scope of my data on the intimate inner workings of the school system was limited, some of my findings are indicative of a system that has yet to veer from Eurocentric models of curriculum that do not incorporate domestic or foreign Black history. Even though Afro-Cuban women are well represented among the teaching staff in education, educational research all over the world has demonstrated that culturally relevant curriculums allows students to identify and resonate with material in ways that they normally wouldn't. Ultimately, culturally and racially inclusive curriculums would greatly improve student outcomes but more importantly would work to create a more racially inclusive society, which was one of the objectives of the Revolution. This is the visible disconnect in Cuban Education.

Similar to how the United States indoctrinates students to believe freedom and democracy are synonymous with capitalism, the rhetoric of Cuba's Civic Education helps students to develop attitudes that allow them to consent to a state driven and external control of labor, which Mallot identifies as dehumanizing and in opposition to the natural human spirit (Mallot 231). Whether the school system is disconnected from the emotional needs of citizens or lacks of a racially inclusive curriculum, it is this disconnect and exclusion that has resulted in and necessitated Black organizing spaces.

This is not to say that efforts have not been made in the classroom to combat racism. The system is regarded as centralized and vertical so that students in the east

receive the same education as students in the west but according to data collected from Afro-Cuban educators in Arlo Kempf's article, "Post Racialism in the Classroom in Cuba as Anti-Racist Praxis in Cuba?", some teachers don't always view themselves as passive transmitters of national discourse but actually work to dispel notions of racism and instill the value of inclusion in both their students and if necessary, their families. (Kempf 57). Kempf utilizes Sawyers notion of inclusionary discrimination establishing that one is not excluded because of race however race determines the terms of inclusion (45). Accordingly, 42% of teachers feel it is their responsibility to address racism in their classroom and while these efforts are important, many Afro-Cuban scholars are still calling for a reform in the system. While the small number of interviews I conducted and this study's lack of quantitative data limits the generalizability of the results, what is implicit in a rise of racial consciousness is the determination to encourage Afro-Cuban people to become critically aware of the ways in which they are excluded from certain spheres of power. Educational reform was not explicitly identified as the primary objectives of the organizers I interviewed, however each one was aware of disparities and discussed their projects and communities as if they operated outside of this paradigm. Their narratives seemed as if they are well informed and cognizant of their reality but ultimately are motivated by feelings of commitment, love, and a genuine desire to uplift their community.

The efforts of organizers, community workers, and artists in Marianao were reminiscent of Zoe Samudzi and William C. Anderson's critique of Black exclusion in their article "The Anarchism of Blackness". While the two writers are elaborating from a US context, the ideas emanate from the Diasporic and shared experience of the

violence of displacement, exclusion and slavery. She states that Black people can be considered an extra-state entity and “due to the extra state location, Blackness is, in so many way, anarchistic”(Samudzi and Anderson). It is the ability to create culture in spite of being forcefully removed from your lands, the ability to organize outside of state structures, and the ability to both defend oneself and assert autonomy that works in an anarchistic way. This is not to say that this is their political baseline. While their assertion that these abilities call into question the legitimacy of the American state, her claim also critiques historical forms of Afro-Cuban exclusion that were justified by a fear believes Black identity to be an inherent threat to the cultural homogeneity of Cubanidad. Many of the organizations that I met did not I identify a defined political leaning but were united behind definitive wants and desires for change that they are all collectively working toward. It is the social and theoretical location of each activist, group, and organizer that complicate the narrative of a resistance that is directed specifically at a state entity, when that narrative was never explicitly identified, perhaps as it would be from Black people of the Diaspora living within other settler colonial states. Even Teresa’s nostalgic feelings toward the Revolution and the Literacy campaign call into question the pointed direction of Black organizing and the objectives. These groups and their narratives are of importance because they complicate contemporary assumptions of how African culture and narratives are entangled or located within Cubanidad. Robert Zurbano’s argument on the tension that exists between the two identities of being Black and Cuban and the de-racialization of oneself highlights the oppositional objectives popular education. This thesis incorporates a dynamic perspective on research about Cuban Education because first, it disrupts

typical ethnographies of Cuban education by providing a critique exclusively from the perspective of Afro-Cuban people but also because the project of raising racial consciousness also speaks to the definitive structural differences between the two projects and spaces. While one calls for the de-racialization in the fight for equality, the other suggests racialization (raising racial consciousness) is the entry point for a deeper understanding of oppression. This framework as a political lens for an analysis of community schooling warrants further examination.

This case study sheds lights on the structural differences between how students are engaged both within institutions of education and within popular education spaces and it quite different. The horizontal, ground up, and mutually liberating nature of radical popular education practices allow for much more autonomy on behalf of all participants that seek to create an experience that is rooted in their realities and embraces and uplifts people from all walks of life.

I don't intend to conclude this thesis with suggestions because there is still a lot to be learned about this topic. However, this project definitely opens up new lines of inquiry for further study of both Education and Black organizing in Cuba. For example, how does the state intend to improve the next racial demographic census and how will that impact educational data? What do teacher preparation programs instruct specifically to combat notions of racism? What are the efforts to create a Black Studies program in the universities in Cuba and how might this impact Cuban racial consciousness? It is my hope that this thesis has effectively contributed to a growing body of literature on Cuban Education and Black Organizing but also that these questions will have answers in the near future.

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