

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Carnival celebrations in Santiago de Cuba transform large swaths of the city for an anticipated week of festivities, during which Afro-Cuban dancers and musicians are center stage, performing a complicated statement of prescribed cultural ideology, historic acts of agency, and nationalism. A particularly revealing celebration, carnival can be understood as a publicly performed conversation between individuals and the real and imagined societal structures encountered in daily life. This government-sponsored presentation in Santiago de Cuba privileges particular expressions and behaviors while heavily restricting others. An exploration of carnival celebration sites during the summer of 2016 reveal particular organizational elements which impacted the participation and presentation of carnival celebrations. Noting a distinct absence of public participation and carnivalesque spirit within the official carnival parade space, ancillary celebrations reveal a curious dedication to preserving both under less strictly monitored conditions. This thesis explores the official and ancillary carnival celebrations, while identifying organizational and ideological forces impacting carnival celebrations in Santiago. Using academic research, participant observation, and interviews with various stake-holders, these particular divisions are explored and influencing factors identified.

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Seeking the Carnivalesque: An Investigation of Carnival in Santiago de Cuba

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Melanie Nichol, Author

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Santiago's carnival shows its heritage of African and Spanish roots. As one of the five original Spanish villas and early receiving port for the Atlantic slave trade, both are omnipresent. This Spanish colony claimed the location in 1515, quickly decimating the indigenous population and becoming the most receiving of Spain's colonies of men, women, and children of the Atlantic slave trade. Santiago served as the early receiving port for thousands of African slaves well before Havana was a crucial port and capital. As Cuba's hunger for labor grew, so did the numbers of men, women, and children brought to the island through the Atlantic trade, expected to be near one million individuals.¹ Santiago held the title of capital to Cuba until 1589 and remains the second city of the island, understood as the capital of the east. Early Africans of distinct cultural groups found themselves forced together against the Spanish Catholic rule, and discovered restrictions directed at discouraging organization which could lead to uprising.² Pedigreed hierarchy distinguished the ruling elite among *peninsulares* (Iberian Peninsula born), and *criollos* (peninsular parents and Cuban born), and both concerned themselves greatly with strategies to control the ever-growing African population from upsetting the plantation system. Within ever-evolving efforts of Spanish control, these newly-arrived Africans individually and collectively used tactics to create social support and

¹ To read more regarding the complicated methodology and revision involved in assessing the total number of individuals brought to the island please see Murray 2002, or Bergad 1995. To learn more of the tactics and victories toward gaining freedom or the social life of Cuba's plantation economy, please see Scott 2000, or Hall 1996.

² For an in-depth and detailed account of European colonial administration, reception, classification, and ideological constructions of the Atlantic slave industry please see von Germeten 2008.

networking channels. These *cabildos* (confraternities based upon self-organization) would prove to create organized groups of Afro-Cubans. As participation in Catholic processions offered a rare relief from hard labor; many took advantage of these public rituals and organized participation with their own elements, as they could. Singing, dancing, fabric and grass fashioned costumes, and a spectrum of African drumming cultures syncretized, justifying their expression within approved Catholic elements.

My goal in this thesis is to explore carnival practices in Santiago de Cuba 500 years later with a focus on the differences between official and unofficial celebrations. First I will review approaches to the study of Carnival and the history of Carnival in Santiago. In Chapter Two I present my methodology, followed by a description of the 2016 Carnival I observed in Chapter Three. In Chapter Four I examine differences between the official and unofficial carnivals with a focus on the carnivalesque and participation.

Approaches to the Study of Carnival and the Carnavalesque

Preparations to host the large crowds drawn to carnival in Santiago de Cuba began well in advance of the celebrations. Many Santiagueros eagerly awaited this week in which fantasy and local heritage were blended with the Cuban nationalist pride, all to the rhythm of exciting African drumming. The carnival celebration provides a temporal space within which overarching social structures are provisionally lifted, allowing for the possibility of public deviant expressions. Best explored by Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) within *Rabelais and his World* (2007), these deviant expressions challenged popular and official power and demands. The challenges emerged from satirical costuming of

officials, songs or chants cleverly exposing the weaknesses of powerful clergy or members of royalty. Social norms of feminine expectations were upended and the whore was championed in costume and behavior, often with aggressive sexual humor and behavior by women. Overall celebrations promoted an excess of food and drink breaking behavioral norms followed the rest of the year. These deviant expressions within the carnival celebrations emerged as the carnivalesque, and it is here we find the contested possibility of real challenges to the status-quo. While carnival presents a festival in which the carnivalesque can emerge, through the temporary lifting of social behavioral norms, the expressions vary greatly among populations. Each presentation of carnival reflects both historical and contemporary socio-political themes and the relationship of hierarchical governance between the elite and the masses. Essentially a performed conversation, an analysis of carnival provides an opportunity to view this conversation between societal frameworks and individuals moving within them.

Bakhtin's carnivalesque within carnival celebrations can be viewed in Pieter Bruegel's *The Battle between Carnival and Lent* (1559), a detailed painting highlighting the temporal upheaval of social behavior taking place just before Lent. Indulgent and gluttonous fried meat and sweets contrast with the severity of dried fish and bread. Gambling, drunkenness, and ecstatic dancing draw the eye from the gloomy yet dedicated somber faces of the pious. The carnivalesque is clear here against the landscape of the social and religious order in place outside this temporal relief, but the return to that order is always suggested. Here we find the basis of dissent within the theory of carnivalesque; Are these statements during performance of the carnivalesque meant to promote

challenges to the larger social frameworks? Or do they serve to fortify those same social frameworks by consenting to the return to status-quo after the carnival celebration?



Image 1 Pieter Brugel, Fight between Carnival and Lent (1559)

Academic inquiry

The bulk of academic inquiry of early carnival is centric to festivals of Western Europe and highly favors a focus of a European interpretation. The carnivalesque, however, the communal performance discourse during which the social framework of society is temporarily lifted, can be found globally. A popular interpretation of the carnivalesque function within society has been a Durkheimian functionalist approach, finding these protests of societies structures served as a pressure release valve in which this organic yearly cycle allowed for the symbolic release of a myriad of stresses and expectations. Crichlow and Armstrong (20110) argue the carnivalesque was a harmless, albeit hopeful, and encouraging ritual. While recognizing the satisfaction this temporal release allowed participants, they understand its usefulness for the powerful as a strategy of social control- allowing the masses to express social protest under a ritual that is

temporal and with its end so does the protest. Gluckman (1963) and his exploration of rebellion within Zulu and Bantu ceremonies conferred as much, going so far as to note that ritual rebellion occurs within societies where this rebellion would result in actual revolution. The persistence of this carnival theory is understandable, as it serves to temporarily pacify angst, frustration, and resistance of prescriptions and proscriptions of the ruling authority. These protests may not lead to easily recognizable results, but do these performances of protest effect change? This celebration has drawn the attention of anthropologists exploring further the role of carnival in particular cultural landscapes, giving way to critical analysis of what is being contested during carnival. If not leading to actual liberation, why the persistence of the carnivalesque temporarily upsetting (often at great cost) the social framework of a society? What do the expressions of protest reveal about the lived social experiences and social identities of the population? What can we learn during carnival of carnivalesque expressions?

A critical approach to carnival and the carnivalesque came late to the study of Cuban society. Investigations during the Spanish colonial period (1511-1889) centered themselves upon categorization and were concerned with seeking the genesis of carnival components. Curiosity of African elements and religion sought to link these elements (language, spirituality, music, dancing, performance) to their varied ethnic group. Often referenced Cuban criminalist-come-anthropologist Fernando Ortiz (1881-1969)³ exhaustively detailed the terms, instruments, and spiritual elements found in Cuban

³ While devoting much of his adult life to the inquiry of Afro-Cuban expression, Fernando Ortiz inspired much negativity of the syncretic Afro-Cuban religions such as Santería, Palo Monte, and Abakua through his reckless associations of demonic activity and human sacrifice.

carnival celebrations. Complicating reliance upon Ortiz's further interpretation of Afro-Cuban expression are his early and repeated concerns that these African expressions threatened a progressive society. Ortiz eventually reversed course, however his previous reliance upon racialized and anecdotal narratives complicate his contributions. It can be argued that Ortiz was more greatly concerned with the ritual form (presentation, elements, instruments, organization of the ritual) of carnival, rather than the function (participation, engagement, carnivalesque) of carnival.

Critical investigations of the carnivalesque function within a society proved to expose intricate social webs of power, representation, and identity in Cuba (Aching 2002, Moore 2006). Judith Bettelheim's (1993, 2001) research in Santiago de Cuba itself detailed the evolution of Afro-Cuban heritage and identity within carnival presentations. Persistent racialized social structures were pierced by these Afro-Cuban centered public performances offering recognition from state, local, and neighborhood members. Kristina Wirtz (2014) further analyzed race, religion, and the carnival heritage in Santiago de Cuba. In the richly detailed *Performing Afro-Cuba: Image, Voice, Spectacle in the Making of Race and History*. Essentially disassembling the state-presentation of Afro-Cuban folk performances during carnival, Wirtz details the role of Santería and carnival in the construction of Black identity in Santiago de Cuba. Associating language, religion, and performance, Wirtz shows how the Cuban state constructs the Afro-Cuban narrative of heritage. At the same moment, Wirtz details how folklore and religious performances during carnival serve to strengthen individuals' sense of place and identity within the state strategies of control and narrative.

Critical examinations of Cuban carnival in practice offer the opportunity to view how tradition is created through presentation of the carnivalesque. Curating elements of history and heritage in rituals and folk performances demonstrate choices made by the ruling officials and of those ruled. Significant social, political, and economic shocks such as regime changes, economic depressions, and civil social unrest can impact both the overarching social framework and the response from the masses. Carnival in Santiago de Cuba reflects the colonial, American neo-colonial republic, and the current stage of Castroism.



Image 2 Map of Cuba and Santiago de Cuba

Carnivals of Santiago de Cuba's past

Colonial carnival in Santiago de Cuba showed a great concern for the blurred lines and inversions of social status and hierarchy during carnival. While allowing for a topsy-turvy presentation of social identity, officials used complex strategies in an attempt to control the degree of challenge expressed. Officials generally accommodated indoor carnival balls as protected White space, and public street parades as a temporary yield to Black space, and all with conditions. Social conservatives feared the African derived elements on public display were anchoring Cuban society's advancement. Religious conservatives feared the increasing display of African religious elements posed a real and physical threat to Cubans, including a number of wide-spread moral panics.⁴ Colonial period Afro-Cuban self-organizing produced benefit societies furthering the sharing of cultural knowledge and mutual support. These support organizations furthered the mutual instruction of what would be performed during carnival and would later play a crucial role in organizing and informing Afro-Cubans of independence movements (Howard

⁴ One such enduring moral panic began in the colonial period and sporadically reappeared until possibly the 1990's. December, the month of the syncretized Catholic saint Santa Barbara and the Santería deity Chango, was suspect due to the fear of perceived satanic elements within Santería. The narrative that children or babies would be stolen in December and used for sacrifice became widespread. One interviewee whose birthday falls in December remembered not being allowed outside to play for fear of being kidnapped and sacrificed. A history professor at the Universidad de Oriente in Santiago de Cuba spoke of the same, acknowledging the complications of these fear narratives. He recalls feeling certain this was a persistent prejudicial myth stemming from racial tensions, however he escorted his daughter to school with a machete tucked under his briefcase. A Santiago de Cuba police detective recounted that once an infant was found deceased and discarded during December, and many considered it confirmation of child sacrifice, however it was determined a natural death.

2014, Russell-Wood 2000). During colonial Cuban carnivals, Black bodies claiming public space to demonstrate African cultural expressions was in and of itself a statement of protest. Many protests to these public expressions of African heritage can be found in El Carnaval Santiaguero (Pérez Rodríguez 1988), a treasure trove of public appeals regarding carnival in Santiago de Cuba. Resident's appeals reveal the same concerns initially held by Fernando Ortiz, that the African elements of Black carnival celebrations threatened to categorize Cuban society as less advanced than a show of European customs.

The Spanish colonial rule ended with the Spanish American War, and Cuba entered the Republic period (1901-1959) marked by neo-colonial administration by the U.S. via treaty. Santiago de Cuba's carnival reflected the change in structure and influence. Commercial sponsorship, luxurious contest prizes, and marketing campaigns brought new interest by elites (overwhelmingly white) to the public carnival parade. The carnivalesque during this period was generally centered in the city center. Parque Céspedes served as the place to see and be seen as streamers and candy were tossed at costumed revelers in elegant convertibles as they circled the park and downtown streets. Stores advertised costume and mask rentals, *serpentine*s (long streamers to be thrown), and heralded the impending carnival period. Consumables such as beer and soda held campaigns related to the beauty contest for the carnival queen and her court. Votes were counted with bottle tops and the queen could walk away with a new Ford convertible while the court won new refrigerators or appliances. (Pichel and Garca 2015) Still, white space claimed much of the indoor celebrations held in grand spaces- curiously many of which were constructed as mutual-benefit societies for regional Spaniards. Similarly, as

Africans and their descendants organized themselves in this new land, so did Spaniards from Galicia, Asturias, the Basque region, etc. These peninsular born created their own mutual support organizations, using growing wealth to build grand halls and casinos which hosted carnival balls indoors. The out of doors public space remained as the celebration space for most Afro-Cubans, and officials regulated this public space very differently from the White indoor celebrations. Newspaper accounts published pleas from residents to control the carnivalesque expression in the streets, resulting in periodic prohibitions of masking or drumming publicly, but allowed in designated indoor (White) celebrations. (Pérez Rodríguez)

The carnival of 2016, and the basis for the bulk of research for this thesis, coincidentally occurred at the cusp of changes for Cuba. Fidel Castro, the ideological figurehead even after resigning the presidency to his brother Raul Castro in 2008, had been largely absent from the public eye as he weakened with age and health problems. As his 90th birthday approached (August 13th), signs appeared scattered throughout the city on houses, buildings, and incorporated into the state-provided carnival decorations.



Image 2 Los Sueños carnival decorations of “90” marking Fidel Castro’s 2016 birthday

Fidel was nearing the end of a 57-year exercise in creating a new nation based upon a dramatically different imagining of how this new Cuba would function and be ordered. Having declared Cuba as a communist state in 1960, he and key figures set about excising the enemy's presence and replacing it with newly imagined political, economic, and social frameworks under which Cubans were to live. In long speeches he spoke of how this new system would right the wrongs of colonialism and American intervention.

Strategies to achieve that end are described by Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983) detailing the invention of a nation through nationalism, imagining a community within which members create an imagined communion with others whom they may never meet, see, or hear. Castroism nationalized industry, transportation, the press, healthcare, agriculture, education and cultural institutions. Publicly curating re-imagined space to reflect new ideologies occurred in the public presentation of Cuban folk rituals such as carnival. Fidel's understanding of carnival and its accompanying functions, the same that were feared by Spanish colonists, is clear. He both utilized the curtain of carnival for his failed July 26, 1953 revolution attempt in Santiago de Cuba (for which he was imprisoned and exiled) and utilized the unifying power of Afro-Cuban cultural groups during his re-imagining of this new Cuba. History has proven that support by Black Cubans was necessary for any successful movement, therefore challenging the carnival tradition of public African expressions neither interested Castro nor would be of service. Instead, Castro used strategies to present a curated and singular national memory represented during carnival that would, arguably superficially, appease Afro-Cubans and further the ideological messages of the central state. Afro-Cuban heritage in Cuba

celebrated resiliency and rebellion without a competing ideological state attached, as opposed to Catholicism with its papal influence. While colonial Catholic clergy saw pagan Afro-Cuban religions such as Santería or Palo Monte as a threat to the Christian fabric of society, the lack of a central papal official who wields power and influence upon followers served Castroism well. Afro-Cuban presentations during Santiago carnival now had the permission of the state to claim the public street for their performances of African heritage. Prior to Castroism these elements faced much criticism in their public displays and performances; however under Castroism they flourished and transformed the officially presented carnival celebrations as ritual expressions of religious African heritage. The performance group *los Hoyos* in Santiago give an example of a usual beginning to a street performance during my research in 2016. Guests and group members come with leafs, tobacco, and rum for the ceremony honoring their *orisha*, or Santería god, *Ellegua*. A large stone in the center of their performance center receives the offerings such as rum sprayed with the mouth, tobacco smoke, and green leaves signifying the opening of paths. This public performance and celebration of carnival for these groups based on African heritage now serves as public recognition and celebration of their Santería (syncretic Catholic and African religious traditions) gods.

Just prior to the 1970 ‘Zafra de los Diez Milliones’⁵ a herculean goal of 10-million tons of harvested sugar cane, Fidel made clear what purpose he saw for carnival in Cuba. He announced that Christmas and New Year celebrations were canceled due to

⁵ Many sympathetic to the cause of strengthening Cuba’s sugar production, and by extension the new Castroism, came from other communities to assist including work brigades from Canada and the United States.

the conflict of the sugar cane harvest peaking at that time. Instead, he proclaimed, all would be celebrated during carnival which now took place on July 26th - a reference to the July 26th Movement who undertook the failed 1953 overtaking of the barracks at Santiago de Cuba's Moncada. Fidel and fellow revolutionaries used the cover of carnival crowds, revelry, fireworks, and expected heavy drinking to attempt overtaking the Moncada barracks. Temporarily privileging carnival as the Cuban holiday as opposed to Christmas or the New Year was a statement that bound Cubans together for a monumental task, the celebration of which would be sponsored under the umbrella of Cuban heritage. This movement can be understood as tasking carnival public celebrations as a vehicle for ideological messages of the official state.

The strategies used by the Cuban state under Castroism served the tactics used by Afro-Cubans seeking to express their African heritage through folk performances. Hard-fought during colonial times, space for African-derived bodies and elements were abundant- but provisional upon accordance with Castroist ideology. Capitalism was the enemy, as such gone were the brand-name sponsors of carnival performance groups and the beauty queen with her court. The Cuban central state was now the sole sponsor and economic support for grand public performances such as carnival. The queen and her court struck the Cuban state as quite hierarchical, and were replaced with *La Estrella y Las Estrellitas*, or star and her little stars. Carnival was understood as an important public event which needed infusion of state messages. Elements of the colonial and republic period remained but paired with images and statements recognizing Fidel as the liberator of Cubans from tyranny and the architect of a singular Cuban nationhood. Controlling cultural exchange was another strategy of the Cuban state during Castroism. Suspicion of

foreign content and obligatory adherence to state ideology resulted in state-controlled press, publishing, television, and arts. Under the Ministry of Culture carnival performances, space, and participation was regimented. Official presentation of carnival became the public parade route instead of carnival balls in elegant casinos, and Afro-Cuban *congas* were the foundation.

Chapter 2: Methodology

This study explores Santiago de Cuba's carnival of 2016 with the purpose of analyzing how Santiagueros engage with carnival. Using research conducted during three months in the summer of 2016 as well as six subsequent visits, this thesis is based on six months of participant observation over two carnival seasons. During that time I conducted semi structured interviews of 65 people involved in various aspects of carnival and maintained field notes of observations and interactions. I was only able to record 12 hours of the interviews which will be explained below. Interview recordings, photos, and video were reviewed, and transcriptions done of selected interview portions. I speak, read, and write Spanish confidently, a necessity in Cuba where English language education is difficult to obtain. In August of 2016 I watched a televised conference discussing future education goals, one of which was to increase access to English language which was hyper-focused on medical student training, and rarely available to students pursuing other career paths. This project would not have been possible without the ability to communicate without assistance in Spanish.

Positionality

U.S. passport holders doing research in Cuba face a curious liminal state of 'official being' when attempting to research in Cuba. First, longstanding ire and suspicion between U.S. and Cuban state administrations is well documented. Suspicion of

Americans acting on behalf of U.S. interests within Cuba is fed by decades of subversive acts, espionage, and assassination attempts. However, this is rarely reflected in the U.S. nor Cuban proletariat with one notable exception: The powerful Cuban diaspora in Miami, highly critical of Castroism, seeks to limit any external funds to the island having determined that they serve to maintain the central regime. This influence contributed to formal restrictions on individual U.S. travel to the island based upon controlling tourist dollars from providing that support. Current authorizations based on changes by President Obama's administration in 2016 maintained 12 approved license-free categories of travel to Cuba. Research and education are U.S. approved, but not individual travel for leisure or vacation. Cuban immigration officials dictate the inverse, that travelers from the U.S. shall be solely for leisure, yet they acknowledge that doing otherwise is a regular practice. U.S. officials dictate that Americans traveling to Cuba for leisure must do so through licensed tour groups and maintain a steady schedule of educational and cultural activities. However, Americans can easily travel independently if they identify themselves as belonging to one of the 12 categories such as photographers, or some type of independent research purposes.

Secondly, transactional sexual tourism in Santiago de Cuba and across the island is a vibrant and visible economy. Having read a number of journal articles and ethnographies detailing this phenomenon⁶, I still found myself unprepared for the depth of its effect upon Santiagueros and *extranjeros* (non-Cubans), and upon myself. As a 40-

⁶ To read more about transactional sex tourism in Cuba, with a general research focus on Havana, please see Kempadoo 1999, Fernandez 1999, Cabezas, 2009), Trumball 2001, and Simoni, 2014.

something White American woman travelling alone and seeking interactions with Santiagueros I matched quite well with a typical profile of a woman seeking transactional sexual relationships. Decades of transactional sexual relationships has created particular assumptions based upon appearance and behavior, leading to necessary management of expectations. Visiting researchers present similar opportunities as tourists through small economic contributions (meals, drinks, small donations, and gifts) and possibilities of more. This wave of attention that can accompany representing economic possibilities brought about an initially overwhelmingly male informant pool. Not wanting to present an unbalanced sampling, I placed greater effort towards balancing the informant pool and found success through reaching out to women who were gathered in front of their homes while I walked the city streets in the mornings and early evenings.

This is significant not only in describing the positionality of a female *extranjeros* researching in Santiago, but also to point to the overwhelming percentage of men who approach a researcher in public. I soon found that a concerted effort needed to be made to include the female voice of the carnival experience in Santiago. This was resolved by spending evenings walking the routes of the current and former parade spaces approaching women for their opinion of living near carnival, and by surveying opinions of female employees of carnival spaces.

An additional and related aspect of presenting one's self as a researcher from outside Cuba is the idea of reciprocity with cultural groups when interviewing. Extremely limited funds for cultural groups and *focos culturales* has resulted in a symbiotic relationship of small cash donations, a bottle of rum, or a specifically requested item between the researcher and the interviewees. These relationships must be managed

carefully to avoid misunderstandings or mismanaged expectations. A director of a *foco cultural* and I discussed books related to carnival in Santiago, and he arranged a librarian to assist me in searching the Elvira Cape library for related content. I spent several days reading and taking notes from several volumes, and later was visited by the director who had brought two books he thought I would like to buy. I recognized them from the library, as they had a small amount of marginalia in red ink. I thanked him but declined, understanding that I would be removing them from the library and may never be replaced. He continued to visit my home uninvited and wait an hour or more for me to return, causing the family with whom I lived to request that he be asked to only come when invited and previously arranged. He later told me that his girlfriend was a hairdresser and was hoping I could bring a large commercial hairdryer/seat combination, which I had to explain was impossible.

Independently operated apartment and room rentals (*casas particulares*) provide the bulk of lodging in Santiago de Cuba, with several large hotels offering a more expensive and differently controlled environment. The operators of *casas particulares*, who maintain an impressive networking system of referrals and commission, must have homes or apartments in areas considered desirable for lodging and meet rental criteria. Homes must be in good repair, large licensing fees must be paid, and they must comply with the immigration official's strict system of registering guests. Post-revolution nationalization of industry, businesses, personal homes and cars meant familial wealth could rarely be purchased and must be inherited. *Casas particulares*, or private room rentals which can generate considerable income, are likely located in Santiago's *repartos* which were populated by White Cubans with some wealth. These largely White *repartos*

that received development and investment in the past seem to still hold the attention of public works projects. Largely Black *repartos* in Santiago which were marginalized pre-revolution by neglect seem to maintain a similar position post-revolution. Continually marginalized repartos such as San Pedrito and Chicharrones suffer from high crime rates, stagnant water in the barely passable dirt roads best navigated by horse, bicycle taxi, or on foot. Elegant Vista Alegre and Terrazas a Vista Alegre boasts wide, quiet streets lined with massive colonial or republic period homes, and are overwhelmingly White. As the initial exodus of White Cubans following the 1959 revolution influenced remittances (and possibility of investment) for White relatives, the increasing influence of Black Cubans immigration beginning in the late 1980s is increasing the possibility of more economic possibilities for their family members as well.⁷

During research in the summer of 2016 I lived in the *reparto* las Terrazas de Vista Alegre, renting one of two rooms on the second floor of a family home. This family home was inherited by the two daughters of a military official and his wife. One daughter continued in the home to operate the *casa particular* while the other moved to Havana but maintains an economic interest in the inherited business. Neighbors recounted how the family survived the Special Period thanks to his governmental contacts which facilitated a brisk business of growing pigs, chickens, and rabbits at home and selling them for a profit.⁸ The home was located just two blocks off Avenida Garzón, a major

⁷ For more information regarding race, income, and remittances in Cuba see Aguirre 2001, Blue 2009, and De la Fuente 2011.

⁸ The 'Special Period in Times of Peace', commonly referred to as the Special Period, was a massive economic depression resulting from the fall of the Soviet Union, Cuba's crucial economic and industrial partner. The U.S. led embargo left few options for Cuban international partnerships, and the collapse of the Soviet Union removed economic, industrial, agricultural, and social support. A true food crisis ensued, impacting a reduction of some 30% of calories compared to pre-Special Period. Families faced tough

thoroughfare leading to the city center, and a growing hub of transportation options and commerce.

Surveillance

The CDR, or *Comite en Defensa de la Revolucion* (Committee in Defense of the Revolution) is an unfortunately neglected area of research within Cuba and a fascinating structure of social control.⁹ Created just a year after the 1959 revolution, CDR's were structured to divide all Cubans into local neighborhood level (even in the countryside) groups where an elected president resides over details of group members. Throughout Cuba one will see the CDR designation written on a building or sign in urban areas, and in the countryside on a rock, sign, or building, noted by a pound sign (#) and the numerical group number such as #639 for example. CDR's celebrate important revolutionary dates with block parties in which members are expected to contribute food or drink. If the particular CDR is led by a *Fidelista* (a stringent follower of Castro's ideology) attendance is obligatory and deviance can be reported. If the CDR is led by an ambivalent president who views the position as just a temporary and required duty, there exists more flexibility. CDR Presidents and loyalist members can leverage information about members or visitors for state-level consideration of their own affairs. Considered

decisions during this depression, and hunger was a daily reality for many. Stagnant industry, agriculture, and investment left few jobs for many, and transactional sexual relationships provided much needed income. The central government took the position of not endorsing this strategy of survival, but at the same time allowed the practice to reduce the state's economic responsibility for Cubans. The term Special Period in Times of Peace is a reflection of the official state curating terminology in an attempt to control negative reflection of official strategies during this depression. To read more about the Special Period see Berg 2004, Hernandez-Reguant 2009, Rodríguez-Martín, Boris C., and Osana Molerio-Pérez 2014, and Weinreb 2009.

⁹ To read further regarding CDR's in Cuba please see Colomer 2000, and Aguirre 1984.

experts on their own members, the CDR is also a factor in disaster response and large-scale emergencies. Members organize to evacuate elderly or immobile members when needed and can address issues of clean-up post-disaster. Santiagueros are proud of the disaster relief and prevention responsibilities of the CDR, and boast of their successes referring to this function as ‘running like a Swiss clock’. The unresponsiveness of U.S. federal agencies to hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico in 2017, in which many residents were stranded and unaccounted for, is striking against Cuban relief efforts. The organization and responsibilities of CDR’s result in the ability to evacuate and evaluate members in effected areas. Post hurricane responsibilities of many CDR’s include removing debris from homes and gardens of elderly neighbors or those unable to do so.

Arriving home one day during fieldwork I found a notice from the office of Immigration that I was to present myself the following day at 10:00 a.m. for an interview. Immediately concerned, the homeowners assured me that it must be due to curiosity of what the ‘American woman’ was doing in Santiago¹⁰. Friends agreed and noted that I should just be honest and answer their questions, and that Cubans also faced these types of interviews. Arriving on time the next morning very nervous, I was left to wait over an hour while the three uniformed members needed for my interview slowly arrived. Once invited in I was instructed to leave all electronic devices outside the interview office, and that I should not have any recording devices on my person. Once inside the room the

¹⁰ I apparently surprised my landlords when first arriving, as they had been notified of my arrival via telephone by the last *casa particular* owners. American visitors are still fairly rare in Santiago, and my new landlords heard ‘Americana’ but understood it as ‘Haitiana’. They were notably nervous the first several days, later admitting they heard Americans were demanding and were concerned I would be a difficult client.

officers asked questions in a relaxed manner. What was my interest in Santiago? Had I been to Cuba before? What was my job and salary in the United States? What did I think of Donald Trump? For whom did I vote for President? What did I think of Barack Obama? What were my impressions of Cuba? Of Santiago?

I answered questions about Cuba openly, and advised them that questions of salary and voting were for me something private that I wouldn't normally answer. I answered employment and salary questions and gave my opinions of Trump and Obama as I felt it would not complicate my position. However, I noted that voting was private, and I did not want to answer although my opinions would lead one to assume. The interview lasted for approximately two hours during which I recounted what I knew of Santiago history, food, and carnival. The officials told me they were concerned that I was audio recording Cubans, which was not allowed. I explained that my questions did not seem to address anything I felt was sensitive. Acknowledging the obvious complications between Cuba and the United States politically, I explained that my interest was a public event that the state itself promoted.

The interview ended with an admonishment not to record or interview anyone further, but that I was welcome to "lay on the beach and drink rum". I responded that my behavior as a researcher or tourist was similar, and that asking questions of carnival was my tourist behavior as well, but that I understood their directions. Returning home, I racked my brain to determine what step had led to their interest in me. Later, I remembered playing in the street with two neighborhood children interested in my audio recorder. They took turns introducing themselves as famous actors and pretended to

interview each other. This coincidentally took place in front of a house of an elderly woman who the neighbors referred to as a frequent informant, ready with her telephone to report suspicious activity.

This system of surveillance by community member's functions to inform without necessarily revealing the informant, leading to the predicted lack of trust in speech or actions contrary to *Castroist* ideology. I later was approached several times by Santiagueros eager to talk with me about why I was in Santiago, but who quickly began asking questions understood as prohibited in Cuba. For instance, an apparent carpenter carrying an obvious box of tools began asking me directed questions related to Cuban politics, I quickly told him I don't talk about politics as I searched him for clues to his purpose. Weeks later, a man selling eggs acted similarly, and followed me home making note of where I was living. I had witnessed the delicate dance of how conversations about sensitive topics evolved, and to approach a sensitive topic such as politics in a direct manner suggested a conspiracy to elicit information.¹¹

Unwittingly, the progression of this surveillance led both myself and my now husband from Santiago to the point of real paranoia. In a beach rental during one excursion I noted a man pacing along the sidewalk in front of our bedroom window. He held an item in his hands behind his back, and continued to pace as his fingers manipulated the object as if he were turning it on, then off. I pointed this out to my

¹¹ My Cuban husband, now living in the U.S., continues to reflect this persistent and often subconscious concern of critiquing state officials or offices. Even when speaking in English and discussing U.S. politics in Oregon he continues to drop his voice to a whisper at the moment of critique, returning to his normal speech volume after the critique. While this was a reality for our conversations in Cuba, he understands this speech is not sensitive here in this context, but still reflects a lifetime of monitoring his own critical speech.

husband, who initially dismissed him, but as the man persisted pacing we both watched intently from behind the wooden levers covering the window space. We both became convinced we were being audibly recorded, my husband playing music loudly at intervals to determine if the man was turning the device on or off depending on ambient noise, and it appeared to us he was in fact doing just that. I could not contain my curiosity and created the pretext of walking past him with a cigarette, as asking for a lighter would allow me to make contact and hopefully see what was in his hand. Becoming more nervous as I approached him, I realized my hands were shaking as I held up the cigarette and attempted to casually ask if he had a light, to which he just shook his head and told me he didn't smoke. His hands still clasped around some metal device, I continued around the block and entered the house a few minutes later. We whispered exasperation as to why authorities would think we were having sensitive conversations, eventually deciding to leave the house for the day and discuss the situation elsewhere. Just as we were leaving the home a taxi full of tourists pulled up and the man approached them, finally opening his hands and exposing the square metal key ring he had been holding for the last two hours. He was simply awaiting guests for his room rentals, eager to escort them in person. The grassroots system of surveillance had certainly functioned in my case, limiting my availability to converse about sensitive topics and self-censuring a great deal of speech that I would otherwise have had.

Individual Cubans and those representing cultural institutions such as the *Casa del Caribe*, *Casa de las Religiones*, *Casa de Africa*, and *el Museo del Carnival*, were eager to discuss carnival culture and accompanying attitudes. Historians and cultural experts fielded hours of questions and conversations. Directors and members of the

congas Los Hoyos, San Augustin, Alto Pino, and San Pedrito all participated in interviews, with Los Kimono additionally reviewing the entirety of the recorded 2016 carnival with me to provide insight. Six members of UNEAC (*la Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba*, or the Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba) generously provided their time for a round table discussion of the evolution and significance of carnival in Santiago de Cuba.

As I familiarized myself with Santiago de Cuba, walking the various repartos to gain an understanding of their individuality, the novelty of an *extranjera* outside areas which catered to tourists sparked spontaneous conversations. Within the parade space there were a small number of tourists who wandered down from the city center, but the few I spoke with had happened upon carnival as a coincidence of their visit and could offer little more than acknowledge carnival as an evening of entertainment. Curiously, Santiago de Cuba promotes the *Festival de Fuego*, or Festival of Fire, which occurs just prior to the carnival season in late July. Aligning with Santiago de Cuba's curation of its identity as the 'Pearl of the Caribbean', this festival is publicized on banners and electronic signs towards tourists in the city center and carnival celebrations rarely are targeted for tourism consumption. The Festival de Fuego brings a large number of members from visiting nation states who each present their folk performances in a large public parade in the city center, ending with a *conga* leading to the burning of the devil along the Alameda.

Conducting fieldwork in Santiago de Cuba reinforced my appreciation of the strength of ethnographic research. Santiago de Cuba's society faces strict limitations

placed by state officials as to how they may contradict state-mandated ideology, which includes the presentation of cultural attitudes and opinions. Race, gender, freedom, control, and the manner in which history and heritage are remembered are complicated topics that become further muddled when they cannot be discussed freely. Ethnographic research was crucial to this project as relationships and interpretations depended upon spending a great deal of time conducting discourse analysis of how Santiagueros represented attitudes towards carnival. Within a society which holds many varied measures of censorship and social control, much time is needed to experience that which lies beyond the superficial presentations of Santiago's cultural landscape.

Chapter 3: Description

Official celebration

Parade performance groups comprise the substance of the official parade presentation, each group representing a *reparto* (neighborhood). The performers emerged from the *foco cultural*, or cultural center, of their respective *repartos*. *Focos culturales* were termed so post-revolution and find their heritage in the Atlantic slave trade. These benefit societies formed to practice customs and aid one another were originally termed *cabildos*, from *cabildos de nación* meaning a headquarters or chapter house of African ‘nation’ or ethnicity (Bolivar 1997). While organized under the protective distinction in colonial times of a Catholic saint, these groups created and recreated practiced traditions from the varied influence of group members. Today, these groups comprise the foundation of the carnival parade.

Carnival has occupied many locations in Santiago through the centuries of its existence. The carnival parade of 2016 took place along the Alameda, or boardwalk of Santiago along the Bay of Santiago. The parade zone occupied four lanes of Avenida Menendez and was flanked by wooden stadium seating. Approximately four street blocks in total, the area was spatially organized with a high degree of control. (See Map 1) There was an entrance (south) and exit (north) monitored by uniformed municipal officers, plainclothes agents from the office of immigration, and members of elite security forces

noted by their black uniforms and berets. These officials monitored the parade at the entrance and exit, and at times meandered through stands or gatherings at the entrance to the parade area. The stadium seating itself was organized and required a ticket to enter. Stadium seating on the east and most of the seating on the west of the street was reserved (although not posted) for Cubans with a small section on the west for *extranjeros*, or foreigners. I was allowed into the Cuban stands before I was aware of the distinction; I had been casually dressed and did not happen to speak to the ticket-taker while entering. The next night I arrived dressed formally having arrived from an important round-table discussion. The ticket-taker asked me if I was Cuban, and upon hearing ‘no’ directed me to the area for non-Cubans.



Image 4 Stadium seating along the Alameda parade site, seating for extranjeros in 2016 consisted of the two seating boxes on the left side of the image.



Image 5 Official parade space, view towards the entrance with the jury box to the left, and extranjero seating at the bottom right.

Official regulation and enforcement of seating at the parade route problematized engaging with the performance and performers. While street lights illuminated the seating and street of the parade performance space, the entrance area where groups congregated and practice was not as illuminated and could be quite dark. Attendees mingled with performers and examine brightly-colored floats in this area. *Conga* musicians played drums and attendees wandering towards their seats or in search of beer or food congregated around them. A small number of adults and children moved and danced around the performers and engaged with the musicians, however once the performers entered the parade space only those associated with the group (performers, their director, choreographed dancers) were allowed to enter. As the performers passed through the parade area and lingered in front of the judges seating area, or *jurado*, the televised narrator shared some information about the group's *reperto* and history. At the street-level of the parade space were a number of organizers responsible for moving performers through the space on time and in order, armed with clipboards, whistles, or neon-colored vests.

Performances during carnival in 2016 began with an unlikely and very popular display of loud, roaring, cruiser-style motorcycles, seemingly a majority Harley-Davidson. They made several deafening passes in front of the stands, exiting to make room for the *muñecons*. A big hit with the children, *muñecons* are giant papier-Mache characters worn by performers who raced along the length of the parade space to music before spending several minutes teasing and taunting children in the front rows.

Characters such as the pig, dog, and clown seemed less scary however the cockroach and wolf left a trail of crying and screaming toddlers. Next, a series of *conga* musicians with their choreographed dancers moved through the space at the direction of the organizers. These groups have some leeway in their presentation in such that they may play music the entire time, they may insert a short act, they may employ a large number of choreographed dancers, use props, floats, banners, and costumes. For example, this year the *Conga de los Hoyos* entered with two women holding their group banner. One woman was dressed in the colors and design of the Cuban flag, and the other was dressed in an elaborate black and red gown representing *Ellegua*, their Afro-Cuban Santería *orisha* or saint. After their musical performance they presented a short act blending colonialism and Castroism. A man sporting a large moustache, cap, and red cross emblem on his shirt represented Santiago, or Saint James, the patron Catholic saint and namesake of Santiago, spoke of arriving tired to the city and seeking people of strength and character. After his short speech, an enormous fabric fan was unfolded behind him upon which was painted the colonial governor's mansion which still stands next to Parque Céspedes in the city center. A flap painted as a window on the mansion opened and a bearded figure in fatigues leaned out to welcome Santiago and proclaim that Santiagueros

were brave and revolutionary people. After some inserted humor seemingly at the expense of people in the countryside, the crowd cheered and the next group entered. Considering that Fidel's 90th birthday and carnival both took place in August the message of '90+' and 'Feliz Cumpleaños' were inserted in each groups banners and woven deeply in the televised narration.

Outside the immediate parade area was a scattering of food and drink vendors, with the largest and only area with seating just past the parade exit. Fried fish, pork, corn fritters, and pizza were offered, with beer as the most popular drink. Sweets were limited to a fried dough churros and cotton candy. Activities within the food and drink kiosks included the popular temporary tattoo stand promoted towards children and a few vendors selling an assortment of inexpensive plastic toys, books, shoes, and jewelry. Not surprisingly considering the large number of officials monitoring the organization and presentation of the parade, there was little to disrupt the desired outcome of those who sanction the parade.

While noted that the performers are overwhelmingly Afro-Cuban, what of the gendered presentation? The *congas* which comprised the foundation of parade performances exhibited great variance in creative styles and how they designed their performances. Some were accompanied by a small or quite large choreographed dance group (*comparsas* or *paseos*), and some incorporated a brightly lit float decorated within a theme and supporting dancers atop. Adult *conga* musicians in 2016 were exclusively male, while I did meet one young woman of some 14 years in the youth *conga* of *reperto* San Augustin. Dancers were majority female, while some performances presented a

blend of male and female dancers. Dancers upon the floats were also a majority female, while several incorporated several male dances.

Unofficial Celebrations

Outside the official parade presentation were two other sites and presentations of the carnival celebration in Santiago de Cuba; neighborhood celebrations and *conga* street performances. There were several large neighborhood celebrations (Santa Ursula, Chicharrones, el Tivolí) but by far the largest took place in the *reparto* los Sueños. This celebration loomed large over the parade both in terms of popularity and size.

Preparations began early just as with the parade space, but on a larger scale of some 16 street blocks. Los Sueños celebrations stretched along Avenida de Céspedes from the main thoroughfare of Avenida Garzón to Avenida de los Libertadores. Dozens of *ranchos*, or large wood-built kiosks with *guano* (palm thatched) roofs were mixed among tarp and metal kiosks. This long stretch of street was accommodated by the state that closed the street completely well in anticipation of carnival. Several municipal police were posted at the entrance and exit as well as some who wandered the area chatting and eating fair food. Absent were the black-clad special securities forces present at the parade, but assumedly there were plain clothed police or immigration officials.



Image 6 Los Sueños preparations of kiosks along the street and side streets.

The large size of los Sueños carnival celebration was reflected in the food choices; each block hosted kiosks in front of and on the side streets of their location and the offerings were slightly more varied such as spaghetti or churros filled with mayonnaise and ham. Each block offered at least one kiosk with seating and large areas with enormous screens and walls of speakers to play reggaeton, pop, and rap music. Beer was sold in massive quantities in cans, bottles, or the more popular and inexpensive option of filling your mug from the beer dispenser. Families and children were accommodated earlier in the day with child-specific events such as dance competitions. The streets were filled with bodies around 9-10:00 p.m. and by midnight the side streets were also full with people drinking and dancing, singing in groups and eating the varied fried foods. Participants wandered and chatted with friends or coworkers, some leaving earlier as others arrived to stay until most had gone home around 3 a.m., leaving some highly inebriated stragglers behind.

The other unofficial carnival celebration events were mobile street *conga* presentations which occurred for various reasons throughout the year, although the *conga* itself is historically of carnival heritage. The street *conga* can be argued as more closely mimicking early colonial carnival participation by Afro-Cubans. Originating from their respective *focos culturales* the *conga* musicians and director begin in the street just outside with a number of associates or community members waiting to follow. Aside from the umbrella to protect central musicians from the sun and perhaps a banner with the name of the *conga* group, the performance has few additions to the drums and *corneta china* (Chinese flute).



Image 7 *Conga forming in the public street space before moving along their route*

As they begin to play the rhythm draws more bodies from inside their homes and buildings, joining the conglomeration of musicians and anyone who wants to join and

follow. The *conga* begins to look like an organism snaking its way through the narrow city streets slowly growing until it completely fills the street with sweaty bodies moving in the *conga* step rhythm. Larger street *congas* can count on individuals re-selling dispensed beer in repurposed water or soda bottles as they move with the crowd, but there is neither food nor competing music. Invasions, in which one neighborhood group mounts a *conga* that travels to another to show their ‘superior’ talent and following, can last for hours moving through the steep streets in high heat and humidity. In times past, *conga* drummers would stop at wood fires to dry their sweat-soaked drum skins over the heat before continuing, attesting to the physical dedication of participating in *conga* for an extended period of time.

This massive organism of bodies was flanked by periodic municipal police officers who attempt, often in vain, to keep the bodies of *conga* off the sidewalks and in the street space. Armed with their baton they struck me as shepherds with hooks, threatening or swatting bodies that divert too far from the desired path. As a protected white outsider, I was safe from swatting and would receive only gestures to move and furrowed brows. Inside the *conga* organism the only uniformed and marked presence of state officials was the handful of municipal officers who circled the *conga* musicians. The weight of the *conga* crowd can be deliriously suffocating at times and threaten to impede the musician’s ability. These officers seemed unwavering in terms of controlling space and maintaining movement allowing space for the musicians. Several legends exist recounting how someone had been drawn from inside their home by the *conga* rhythm and once they inserted themselves they lost sense of time and place. Once such tale spoke of a woman with a new baby who was enticed outside by the drumming, seemingly

against her will. She lost concept of time, and only when regaining her senses and exiting the *conga* realized her baby had been suffocated in her arms by the density of the crowd.

Aside from the municipal uniformed police officers the larger *congas* can have squads of elite police dressed in black with black berets. The largest *conga* I attended had elite squads with two large passenger trucks to hold detainees at the *conga* midpoint. As I climbed apartment stairs to a landing for a vantage point for photos, young men climbed the railings to occupy vacant apartment balconies. From here I watched in awe of the size and energy of the crowd, when trills could be heard from municipal police whistles deep in the *conga*. The elite police force jumped into action immediately and clearly with practice. Through some unseen organization, they pierced the crowd as if an arrow in a single-file line, holding hands. The lead officer grabbed a man around the neck with his arm from behind, and the arrow retracted as quickly as it had entered, dragging the man behind. He was placed, red-faced and sweating but quiet, in the back of one of the trucks. It was often repeated to me, but unable to confirm outside anecdotal accounts, that once arrested during carnival you are not released until the carnival celebrations have ended.

This mass of bodies could feel as if you are at once immersed and insulated. Immersed in the throngs of people sweating in the heat and humidity, as most perform a rhythmic lock step *conga* dance, but also insulated in a space that many would not enter. While the official parade was performed by groups comprised overwhelmingly of Afro-Cubans, the audience stands in 2016 were a combination of various racialized terms. The street *conga*, in contrast, is a sea of Black bodies with few who would be considered White. A reflection of Cuba's racialized society could be seen in reactions to street

congas to which they associate suspicion and danger. Warnings include threats of being pierced in the buttocks with a nail, touched sexually, women could have long hair cut off from behind, and being caught up in general atmosphere of violence. Expressing my affinity for attending a street *conga* undoubtedly evoked a reaction of comedy and disbelief, with comments related to ‘You have more black blood than a black woman!’.

The *conga* is also insulating, as the danger narrative and post-colonial racialized society continues to privilege associations with white heritage. As such, the street *conga* claims the streets as Black space where White Cubans self-restrict participation. Within this space erupted spontaneous critical speech which is not often encountered in public spaces. Two important issues were at hand in the summer of 2016 in Cuba; the recent visit by Barack Obama and the first American president to visit Cuba since 1928 and the associated changes in relations, and the worsening economic crisis in Venezuela affecting gas prices and some goods. From within the tightly packed bodies filling the street to the building walls erupted chanting ‘Raul and Obama, enough with the speeches, now there’s no oil in la Habana!’ As they continued to chant I tried to see who was involved, but the drumming and massive numbers of people made it impossible to locate more than a general area. In a nation state with decades of strict control over speech critical of the state, this was notable.

Chapter 4: Analysis

Considering the curation of carnival in Santiago de Cuba by officials and the various methods of organization and engagement in this public celebration, where can be understood of carnival and the carnivalesque? Each carnival celebration location and experience present unique celebration spaces resulting from the methods of presentation, degree of governmental control, individual complications of engagement, and influence of narratives. This splintering of celebration space has proved to be helpful in identifying what factors influence the emergence of and engagement with the carnivalesque. Additionally, this splintering of carnival celebration space allows the researcher to analyze questions of social orders depending upon which space the individual engages carnival, or whether they engage at all.

The official parade space, as described previously in the anatomy of carnival, did not provide space in which revelers could perform among performers. The spatial ordering of bodies and performers effectively limited accessing an experience in which

the attendee can blend with performers or perform themselves. Limiting attendees to stadium seating, limiting space in which attendees could personally access performers in the entrance or exit to the parade space, and the high degree of official presence in this space all served to encapsulate and control expressions of carnival. Fantasy, rather than the carnivalesque, provided entertainment to attendees and performers alike. This carnival site is curated by the official state in the sense that symbolism, messages, spatial organization, and participation is controlled within *Castroist* ideology to present a wishful unified national identity centered upon celebrating ideas and people considered important by the state. Infused with curated messages from the central Cuban state along with the strong presence of officials, this presentation appears to have excised the carnivalesque and accompanying performed challenges to social order. Still, these Afro-Cuban performance groups navigate these demands and restrictions to present their very personal and spiritual heritage which, upon analysis, has historically challenged the ideology of the official state's willingness to envelope African heritage into general society. Afro-Cubans continue to struggle against persistent pejorative racialized narratives and lack of equal opportunities, despite Fidel Castro's early declaration of erasure of racialized sentiments.

A curious barrier to Santiagueros election to attend the parade performance was expressed by a clear majority of interviewees when asking about their interest in the carnival parade. The city center sits high over the bay and steep, narrow colonial streets trail down like ribbons to the sea-level boardwalk. The least expensive transportation option of local horse and bicycle taxis cannot climb these direct access routes and must take a much longer and circuitous route to take attendees home. Even the prominent and

numerous motorcycle taxis labor carrying a single passenger up the steep angles, while the expense of a car taxi ride may be undesirable and out of reach for many revelers.



Image 8 Early morning in Santiago de Cuba's old city center, steep view towards the bay and the Alameda

A majority of interviewees preferred when the parade was situated along Avenida Garzón, a main thoroughfare running east and west from the edge of the city center. Residents from several *repartos* described their willingness to attend the parade on Garzón, but not along the Alameda, citing ease of access and ability to walk there and send children unaccompanied to enjoy the festivities. Another possibility of preferring the Garzón location over the Alameda location may be found in their description of the Garzón parade. While the Garzón parade still abided by the restrictions of keeping performers separate from attendees, inhibiting the carnivalesque experience, interviewees

described more integration of performers and attendees at the entrance and exit of the designated parade space. Larger crowds and attendance to the Garzón parade seemed to change the atmosphere; interviewees spoke of engaging with the carnival performances without buying a ticket for the stadium seating. The Garzón parade location offered a greater possibility of interaction and engagement of attendees and performers. It should be noted that the Garzón parade space was centered a few blocks from the entrance of the largest neighborhood (los Sueños) celebration. The popularity of the official parade when located on Garzón could have been influenced by intersecting due to proximity.

The official parade space entertained with floats and costumes evoking fantasy, such as fairies, mermaids, or undersea themes. This is notable in Santiago and Cuba in general, in which goods have been severely restricted since the great economic depression that began in 1989 and still exists in many senses. While resources for carnival decorations were quite limited and are repeated or reused until no longer serviceable, the fantasy is still evident. A brightly lit float with flashing colors, dancers in thematic costumes, music, and fried food all gleam against the gloomy backdrop of daily life. While elements of fantasy provided entertainment, the official control of space and engagement complicated the ability of attendees to merge with performers. High visibility of official monitors (municipal police, elite police forces, and immigration officials) essentially muted the possibility of performing protest, even in satire. While lacking conditions for the carnivalesque to emerge, due to organization, close monitoring, and surveillance narratives, the official parade celebration space continues to celebrate Afro-Cuban persistence and presence within Cuban society. While the official state may have co-opted this celebration performance as a vehicle for promoting and presenting

state ideology, while ignoring the reality of a racialized society for Afro-Cubans, the performance serves Afro-Cubans as a method to continue traditions that began with the arrival of the Atlantic slave trade.

The unofficial carnival celebration site of los Sueños neighborhood celebration presented a unique set of circumstances which resulted in a different engagement of the festival. Without floats, performance groups, or live music (with few exceptions), the attendance to this celebration loomed large over that of the official parade. Earlier in the day it had a more familial feel with kiosks and youth dance competitions. Later in the day and into the night it reflected a more adult population as the street fills with people. Not only was this stretch of Avenida Menendez closed to traffic allowing for pedestrians only, most of the side streets to the next block were also closed and used as space for huge speakers and video screens playing contemporary pop, reggaeton, and rap music. These spaces also filled with people into the night dancing and drinking copious amounts of beer and rum.

While attendance to los Sueños celebration did not appear to be gendered, attitudes were. Men at the celebration spoke of their choice to attend as a temporary labor holiday and pretext to indulge in heavier drinking than they would normally. They spoke of an understanding by employers that during carnival workers could arrive hung-over or late and it was likely overlooked. This draw could be described as a carnivalesque approach in which economic and labor responsibilities are temporarily suspended, and celebration is now a greater priority. Women spoke of los Sueños celebration as opportunity to relinquish domestic responsibilities and exhibit flirtatious and sexy

behavior. Women did not describe a total abandonment of the domestic role, as they noted they prepared for carnival week by preparing food in advance and heaving cleaning of their homes in anticipation of some neglect during the celebration.



Images 9 and 10 No tengo perro ni gato

Just before the summer of 2016 a song was released by artists el Taiger and Dayna titled “*Soltera*”, or single woman.¹² The lyrics caught my attention as they repeated a saying found painted on carnival kiosks and mentioned in terms of feminine liberation during carnival “*No tengo perro ni gato*”, I have neither cat nor dog. The

¹² El Taiger and Dayna, “*Soltera*” (2016)

saying indexes a relief from considering domestic responsibilities, as the woman has neither dog nor cat to care for. I found this curious as I had read that statement before in terms of carnival in Santiago de Cuba. Additionally, as the carnival sites were being constructed I saw that slogan painted on two wooden carnival kiosks along with a highly sexualized image of a woman with breasts and buttocks escaping skimpy clothing, and tossing the dog and cat out the window. Referencing the temporary relief of role responsibilities placed by societies structures, this statement supported the carnivalesque element of gendered role reversal in the neighborhood celebrations. A Santiaguero in his 60's discussed with me that for many women the question of attending carnival is a serious one and that if a man refuses to accompany his female partner to carnival he will be to blame for any bad behavior she may exhibit while celebrating. While there is much to unpack in a statement such as this, the underlying message is that there is a temporary relief of behavior expectations for women who attend carnival celebrations and that it must be attended to by their male partners. We should ask ourselves where such behavior could occur, as the conditions in the parade space do not facilitate this carnivalesque expression while the neighborhood celebrations do accommodate certain expressions.

Another sentiment shared among many interviewees was the lack of carnival entertainment that they remembered from their youth. A group of women in their 40's stated they missed the custom of face painting and dressing silly for carnival celebrations during their childhood. They recounted painting designs such as hearts and adding decorative small dots on their faces and remembered being allowed to wear lipstick to the celebration. This was repeated by female official cultural representatives, lamenting past carnival practices of decorating themselves. Others remembered a single roving minstrel

who entertained crowds with bawdy comedy, involving crowd members in his witty performances. While they could not recall specific content of the performance, they remembered he used word play to hold the attention of the crowds at the neighborhood celebration of los Sueños. These elements of costuming and bawdy street comedy performances are both exhibit a carnivalesque experience and were expressed as fond memories of carnivals past.

The third site of carnival celebrations, the street *conga*, is unique to the previous two sites for celebration in the potential for exhibition of the carnivalesque. While it lacks the fantasy of brightly lit parade floats or scores of choreographed dancer in costume, it does offer a space in which the carnivalesque can emerge. First, a lack of gatekeepers to participation means that access to this public site is not regulated, and regulation by police officials is focused on moving the mass of bodies along and possible eruptions of violence. Inserted deeply in the center of a street *conga* of Los Hoyos, I was impressed with the depth of insulation these bodies provide and even deciding to exit requires great effort. This insulation by sheer number of bodies coupled with the limited number of officials gave an intoxicating sense of force to the *conga* crowd. One male performer with Los Hoyos sported a long, bright yellow wig, dress, and exaggerated prosthetic breasts and buttock- the same as performed during the parade competition. However, within the street *conga* this persona weaved through the crowd playing off the reactions of others, bumping their body against others, increasing the intensity until a reaction is given. During the parade this persona repeated a similar performance, but was playing off the reactions of fellow *conga* performers and musicians instead of the public.

Within this *conga* space participation is self-restricted by White Santiagueros, further enhancing the real and perceived Black space. Narratives of fear and distancing one's self from the representation of Afro-Cuban dominated space essentially privileges Black bodies to this celebration space and its carnivalesque potential. This space provides for a celebration of the Afro-Cuban citizenry in which participants overtake the public street space in a strong show of *communitas* and ecstatic transcendence of time. Returning to the previous story of a colonial-era white woman losing herself in the *conga*, we see the strength of this celebration in which narratives caution against participation in this communal, and within the Cuban context a Black, celebration.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Officials of cultural institutions and interviewed Santiagueros confirmed that Santiago's carnival holds special prestige among carnivals in Cuba. The persistence of Black participation and now central role in the production of carnival is testimony to the strength and auto determination of Afro-Cuban identity within the greater Cuban society. However, the official state's strategies of censorship and control problematize the ability of carnival to allow for the emergence of the carnivalesque function. Speech, symbolism, and presentation in the official parade space is curated by the official Cuban state to such degree that it has evolved to function as a vehicle of the official state ideology. While Black public displays of African heritage in Santiago's past carnivals represented a protest of racial subjugation, Castroism privileged these displays as they no longer presented a challenge to the central figure(s) of Cuba's powerful central state.

Unofficial neighborhood celebrations, such as the example of los Sueños, are distinctly managed and organized by the official state in comparison to the official parade space. Lacking a strong narrative of state ideology and surveillance, neighborhood celebrations provided laborers a sense of relief from long hours and heightened allowances for heaving drinking and celebrating. Women in particular were represented as finding reprieve from domestic and behavioral norms in this carnival space. While not presenting more traditional representations of carnival celebrations such as live *conga* musicians or a parade, the neighborhood celebration of los Sueños does offer a space in which the carnivalesque function can emerge in terms of laborers and women.

Our third carnival space, the street *conga*, gives us a fascinating example of a carnival celebration lacking the pomp and circumstance of either the official parade space or the neighborhood celebration. Without decorations or food and drink kiosks, the street conga is insulated from wider participation by persistent racialized narratives of danger and violence. White Cubans generally restrict themselves from participation, suggesting that this is a particularly Black performance of celebration. The street conga functions through erasing the distinction between performer and attendee as hundreds of bodies form an organism around the musicians, moving as one as they fill the public streets. At first glance this celebration of carnival appears to be controlled by the state only along the fringes; however narratives reveal suspicion that the official state operates and influences deep inside the street *conga*. If confirmed, this could reveal the official state fears the power of this celebration and works to infiltrate and monitor this celebration and its communal, strengthening power. If unable to confirm, it remains that strategies designed by the state to monitor Santiagueros behavior and speech penetrate deep within the street conga casting doubt upon expressions of spontaneous critical speech.

In conclusion, through evaluating methods used by the official state in the curation of carnival celebrations we can further understand what voices and expressions are limited, and which are encouraged. As we see in the example of Santiago de Cuba, voices and expressions muted by the official presentation of carnival represent elements which threaten the prescribed ideological goals of the central Cuban government, while carnival expressions supporting state ideology are privileged. Carnival celebrations in Santiago de Cuba offer varied methods and opportunities to access this temporal state during which emerging concerns can be stated or performed. In closing, examinations of

how carnival and celebrations are organized and performed continue to provide a crucial and productive method of accessing complex attitudes and relationships of individuals and the social structures they navigate daily.

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