FASHIONING AFROCUBA: FERNANDO ORTIZ AND THE ADVENT OF AFROCUBAN STUDIES, 1906-1957

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

Jeremy Leeds Cass

The Graduate School
University of Kentucky
2004
FASHIONING AFROCUBA: FERNANDO ORTIZ AND THE ADVENT OF AFROCUBAN STUDIES, 1906-1957

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Kentucky

By
Jeremy Leeds Cass

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Enrico Mario Santí, William T. Bryan Professor of Hispanic Studies

Lexington, Kentucky

2004

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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This study attempts to organize the conglomerate of writing on Africans within Republican Cuba. Starting with an examination of the scientific stages of such writing, we will trace the assorted work of Fernando Ortiz (1881-1969), whose anthropological study of Afrocuba produced myriad readings of the heritage. The multiplicity of renderings of Cuba’s Africans from the scientific arena – including condemning, racially charged treatises and spiritual conceptualizations of the richness of Cuba’s African heritage – generated an air of inconstancy. Indeed, the contradictions generated by the discipline’s scientific course were incredibly polarized, representative of an ambiguity that became emblematic of Afrocuban Studies. Regardless of such blatant ideological opposition, tracing Ortiz’s anthropological reading of the place of Cuba’s Africans among the nation provides a telling insight into the racialized circumstances surrounding Republican nation-building. Whether scientific research scorned Cuba’s Africans or applauded their inclusion in the national imaginary, Ortiz’s writing – and his invitations to Cuba’s younger scholars to partake of folk study – outlines a succinct treatment of Cuban nation-building between 1902 and 1959.
If scientific research on Afrocuba promulgated studies that both cherished and
demonized Cuba’s Africanness, so too did Afrocuba’s artistic invocations bear
contradiction. After the vogue of the African swept the 1920s Parisian art scene,
Africanized artistic currents infiltrated Cuba and mingled with its scientific counterpart. The
ensuing readings of Afrocuba, contradictory and complex, spurred both research-art
overlaps and the rejection of scientific tenets for a so-called artistically “authentic”
rendering of Afrocuba – that is, a reading from the inside, from within Afrocuba. It is along
these lines that fiction writers (including Alejo Carpentier, Lydia Cabrera, and Rómulo
Lachatañeré) posted renderings of Afrocuba that partook of various degrees of science,
research, and artistic vogue. The resultant narrative system portrayed three different sorts of
Afrocuban literature; none of the writers aligned succinctly in their portrayal. Afrocuba’s
poetic front was even more varied in its evocation of the nation, the academy, and popular
art. In this way, Nicolás Guillén, Ramón Guirao, Juan Marinello, and Emilio Ballagas
encapsulated unique poetic visions on two fronts: through offerings to Afrocuban poetics
and through essays on the Afrocuban poetic mode. We shall examine such pieces in the
hopes of understanding the balanced interplay that academic research and artistic invocation
absorbed in the nation-building process, in the fashioning of Afrocuba.

KEYWORDS: Fernando Ortiz, Afrocuban Studies, Afrocuban Literature, Cuban Literature,
Los negros brujos
FASHIONING AFROCUBA:
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By

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To Anna
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks are due to my committee – Susan Larson, Charles Davis, and Sherry Velasco – for their investment in me as a student and for their interest in me as a person. I will make it a point to model their intellectual caliber, practical matteroffactness, and lighthearted character always. I also thank Susan Carvalho, who has sat with me patiently as I worked through every type of situation, for giving me so much of her time and energy and for being the incessant encourager even when there was not much to draw from. I am especially indebted to the guidance of Enrico Mario Santí, whose direction has occasioned many long hours of reading, rereading, and mending countless drafts of this project while he had much other business to see to. His insight changed this study’s course while it caused me to think about more important things in new ways. Finally, perhaps the biggest thanks of all go to Anna, who has witnessed this project from the other side of things. I thank you for your time, your patience, and your guidance.
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Chapter One, Introduction

“Comencé a investigar, pero a poco comprendí que, como todos los cubanos, yo estaba confundido.”

[“I started to do research, but I shortly understood that, like all Cubans, I was confused.”]

—Fernando Ortiz, “Por la integración cubana de blancos y negros,” 1942 (1998: 293)

This study traces the academic (scientific) and literary fashioning of Afrocuba and the assimilation of such discourse into Republican nation-building mechanisms. Over the course of the Republic (1902-1958), Afrocuban Studies generated multiple scientific methodologies and art forms targeted at nationhood, race, social science, and artistic aesthetics while it suffered from prejudice and political prerogative inherent to white hegemony. A concurrent blessing and curse for Cuban race relations, approaches to Afrocuba from both academic and artistic arenas conjured contradictory treatises on Cuba’s Blacks and mulattoes. If the discipline was uniform in its African thematic, it was, at the same time, incongruous in its assessment of the place of Africans among national symbolic ideals.

We will consider various stages of this murky progression, which, roughly put, outstripped its early-Republican condemnation of African heritage to encase far-reaching meditations on how Cuban racial constructs decay national progress, unity, and spiritual understandings of afrocubanidad. We will see, however, that this so-called ‘progression,’ which deceptively implies a linear advance, was mottled by frequent setbacks, turnarounds, and dogmatic backwardness, just as it experienced great leaps forward in asserting Afrocubans as nationally treasured peoples. Amongst all the actors on Afrocuban Studies’ stage, Fernando Ortiz (1881-1969) was the star. His close connection to the heart of Afrocuban scientific
polemics spanned from the earliest years of the Republic to the Revolution’s eve. Embodying both scorn and appreciation towards Afrocuba, his career provides a telling survey of Afrocuban Studies’ multifarious disciplinary tenets, though there were, of course, a number of other significant actors. In the following chapters we will trace the principal research developments of Ortiz and of many of his contemporaries in order to provide insight into the complexities inbuilt to the rendering of Cuba’s African nation. This is a knotty inquest that requires a fluid reading of Afrocuban Studies as a field, not only ideologically speaking, but also in concrete textual terms. Indeed, the texts we will examine are of all types, genres, and styles, and serve an even wider array of social, political, historical, artistic, and cultural functions. To complicate matters further, alongside Ortiz’s works were myriad incomplete projects, unpublished texts that were alluded to over the course of his work but that never went to press. While mounting the scope of consideration to include such out-of-reach documents should make the discipline’s progression more clear, Ortiz’s emblematic incompleteness actually posits an obscuring force that fogs the sequential details rather than clearing them up. Such indistinctness must be taken as a preamble to all considerations in this study, as pinpointing the ‘truths’ of some of Afrocuban Studies’ moments only invalidates those ‘truths’ of earlier or later treatises.

Before considering some theoretical approaches to Afrocuba, it is necessary first to come to grips with the epistemological rendering of Afrocuba over Ortiz’s career. As he himself reflects in the epigraph above, Ortiz was “confused” in his initial Afrocuban research. So began the career of the discipline’s central celebrity, the figure who put forth an unequaled corpus on Afrocuba. His work must be seen as feeding from a constantly morphing epistemology that located initial research somewhere between cultural discovery and discursive condemnation; later work between the redrawing of national race constructs and Afrocuban celebrations. We
have already noted (and will do so repeatedly) the disciplinary fluidity of Afrocuban Studies, whether ideologically-, generically-, or textually-speaking. But the crux of this fluidity goes well beyond such manifestations. Over its course, Afrocuban Studies is driven by an even more complex, vexing, body of knowledge upon which Ortiz endeavored to put to order. If such admitted confusion premiered Ortiz’s career, his lifelong ambition ironed out the discipline’s epistemological wrinkles – namely, problematic ideologies, racist approximations, over-emphasized political ends, and even incorrect observations about Afrocuban cultural heritage – and offered a repositioned, corrected, and refocused discipline. Afrocuban Studies’ twentieth-century initiations, then, were forged upon unstable epistemological ground but later equated to fortified cultural examination. Disciplinary progressions reworked Afrocuban studies as it went, correcting time and again its shortcomings within larger national schemes of incorporating the African into Cuba.¹

Theoretical considerations of Afrocubanness

Any approximation to Afrocuban Studies hinges necessarily upon a host of theoretical premises, not to mention an equally lengthy list of political and social concepts. For prefacing purposes, we will consider three theoretical schemes: (1) theories behind the Afrocuban subject and its objectification, involving questions of representation, hegemony, and subalternity; (2) theories of the changing science that examine Afrocuban subjects, which in turn recognize Ortiz’s facilitation of changes to the Afrocuban scientific paradigm; and (3) a Republican theorist’s estimation of the Cuban nation construct and how the African fits within it.

¹ Pérez Firmat offers much insight on Ortiz’s constant self-corrective process and metaphorically connects his observations to reflections upon the nature of the Cuban nation itself. We discuss this critic’s views in Chapter Two.
Borrowing heavily from postcolonial and subaltern studies, our first string of theoretical considerations evidences the positioning of the Afrocuban subject and the objectifying constructions assumed by the white positioner. Moore notes how the social and political positioning of Blacks in the Republic centers on notions of hegemony and the subaltern. If at first glance Afrocubans came to center stage of national artistic currents during most of *Afrocubanismo*’s moments, that same grouping was a necessary participant in white schemes of cultural dominance. That is to say, as an object of cultural representation, the actors in *Afrocubanismo* were subjected to the dominant culture’s established boundaries; both scientific and artistic invocations of Afrocuba left Afrocubans at the whim of white Cuban polity and social sway. Moore stages *Afrocubanismo* along these hegemonic lines. “Hegemonic discourse attempts to generate an illusion of national commonality and equality, and to promote its acceptance even among the poorest and most disenfranchised members of society” (115). Such “illusion” is precisely what operates the hegemonic mechanism, and as Moore posits repeatedly, the illusionary portrayal of Afrocuban equality through the white positioning of *Afrocubanismo*, though celebrating the African as popular, remains a cultural medium under white control.

Moore outlines further the intellectual and political writings that positioned Afrocubans within the Republican power dynamic. One such “discursive position” in the early Republic based racial pronouncements on psychological or cultural criteria. It suggested that in physical terms blacks and members of other races were the potential equals of Caucasians, but their traditions and modes of behavior were influenced by an earlier ‘stage’ of cultural development. The best means of integrating minorities into Cuban society, from this perspective, was to suppress African-derived expression and to inculcate ‘superior’ Western middle-class norms and values.
Judgments of this sort by intellectuals justified and perpetuated the campaigns of ‘de-Africanization’ in Cuba. (32)

Moore points openly to the scheme that characterized race relations in the years immediately following 1902, when such delineations undergirded national/political discourse and positioned Afrocuban subjects within a precise cultural boundary. Such rhetoric encased Afrocubans within hegemonic drives that were intimately associated with Republican notions of national culture. As in the case of Ortiz’s *Hampa afro-cubana: Los negros brujos* (1906, 1917), discourse posited from the hegemonic stratum sought to maintain white superiority and eradicate Black “atavistic” setbacks. It is imperative to recognize that such harsh polity later turned to less overtly cruel estimations of Afrocubans within the national imaginary. As Moore himself concedes: “[s]everal authors who came to epitomize the early struggle to valorize Afrocuban arts and whose later works and activism promoted their greater appreciation – most notably, Fernando Ortiz – began the study of Africanisms in order to facilitate their eradication” (32). This is not to undermine the severity of Republican anti-African campaigns.2 His contention, rather, points to Afrocuban scholarship’s ever-contradictory nature, with Ortiz himself as the most salient example. Moore’s summary of Ortiz’s career grasps such contradictions by recognizing the fluctuations of its most central advocate.

Later on in life, Ortiz’s attitudes toward Afrocuban culture changed significantly. He fought against racism in Cuba, founded the Society of Afrocuban Studies, and published several detailed studies of Afrocuban music in the 1950s that for the most part valorized such traditions. These later works are widely known and have

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2 As Moore reminds us: “African-derived religion became a target of officials who pronounced it a ‘social pathology’ brought by slaves to the Americas, a manifestation of the psychological inferiority of blacks” (31).
led to the overwhelmingly positive evaluations of Ortiz in recent years. Far from being noncontroversial, however, most of Ortiz’s publications are replete with troublesome ideological implications. The intellectual trajectory of Ortiz’s career metaphorically echoes the struggles of the entire nation to reposition their collective identity relative to black culture and to accept Afrocuban expression as Cuban. (34)

With Ortiz’s position understood, any discussion of the subaltern must exceed Cuban parameters and go back to the work of Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937). An avid Marxist-Leninist, this landmark intellectual suffered hegemony’s consequences first-hand in fascist Italy, where he paid much critical attention to how hegemonic demarcations served to empower elites. By means of his conceptualization of structure and superstructure, Gramsci’s reading of hegemony relies heavily upon notions of ideology. His reflection on mechanisms of cultural “organization” serves as a useful springboard to the plight of Republican Afrocubans. “To the extent that ideologies are historically necessary they have a validity which is ‘psychological;’ they ‘organize’ human masses, they form the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc. To the extent that they are arbitrary they only create individual ‘movements,’ polemics and so on” (2000: 199). Openly acknowledging such constructs as “arbitrary,” Gramsci’s invocation of Marxist class consciousness also recognizes how a people such as Afrocubans could be constrained and contained by political ideology; how Afrocubans, in their struggle for national recognition, could end up as puppets in hegemonic exercises. We must remember that Ortiz and his early-Republican contemporaries clamored a perceived need to “organize” Cuba’s Africans. Their efforts at eradicating the setbacks of such cultural presence is the ultimate hegemonic ploy: marginalizing certain cultural heritages from centrist notions of
nation. As we will see, subjecting Afrocubans to such hegemonic organization was achieved by condemning Afrocuban practice as ‘social pathology.’ Indeed, the results were so damning that hopes at Afrocubans gaining a “consciousness of their position” as an effective mechanism for national cultural recognition were wholly thwarted.³

Gramsci’s recognition of the “epistemological significance” of hegemonic ideology also resonates with our examination of Afrocubas’s study. He contends that the “realization of a hegemonic apparatus, in so far as it creates a new ideological terrain, determines a reform of consciousness and of methods of knowledge: it is a fact of knowledge, a philosophical fact” (2000: 192). Hegemony sparks “new ideological terrain” and transforms polity to meet the elite’s needs. Afrocuban scientific discourse thereby cemented elitist ideologies against blacks and mulattoes in the early Republic. As the new, modernizing nation was en route to being defined as such, the hegemonic stratum reinforced white dominance by pathologizing Afrocuban practice and authoritatively producing knowledge on it.

Many of Beverley’s offerings to subaltern studies point to the role of academic discourse in this epistemological process, a development intimately germane to Ortiz’s work. Beverley introduces the theme in response to a statement by Spivak on the self-perpetuation of the subaltern through its academic treatment: “the subaltern is subaltern in part because it cannot be represented adequately by academic knowledge” (2).⁴ The privileged position of the academy, the source of elitist discourse on the subaltern, assumes a hegemonic caliber. Moreover, Beverley continues, “[i]n a sense, the very idea of ‘studying’ the subaltern is catachrestic or self-

³ One need not look further than the Guerrita del Doce, the 1912 “Little” Race War in which Black patriots fighting for independence were massacred upon attempting to outbalance hegemonic equilibrium via the attaining of recognition and financial compensation for their war efforts. See Helg, de la Fuente, and Fermoselle for studies on the matter.
⁴ Beverley is responding to Spivak’s position in A Critique of Postcolonial Reason (1999).
contradictory…. Subaltern studies must itself confront and incorporate the resistance to academic knowledge” (30). Academic discourse refuels subaltern demarcations and leaves hegemonic superstructures intact. Thus, Beverley notes that the subaltern “cannot be represented adequately by academic knowledge because academic knowledge is a practice that actively produces subalternity (it produces subalternity in the act of representing it). How can one claim to represent the subaltern from the standpoint of academic knowledge, then, when that knowledge is itself involved in the ‘othering’ of the subaltern?” (2). Beverly’s insight is paramount to any consideration of Ortiz. As Cuba’s most fervent cultural archivist, Ortiz represented the never-ending production of academic discourse. Moreover, he was constantly concerned with reformulating national culture. While Ortiz’s work equated to an “othering” of Afrocubans, though more at some points than at others, it seems as though, regardless of ideological position, his apportion of academic discursivity to Afrocuba still upholds its subalternity. If indeed Ortiz’s work “produces subalternity in the act of representing” Afrocuban culture, even his most celebratory examinations of Afrocuban heritage as nationally valuable and historically rich must meet scrutiny. While the dogmatic prerogatives surrounding Ortiz’s early contributions speak clearly to such hegemonic premises, his later body of work masks such drives. Indeed, few scholars have recognized any disparaging slants in his later production (although such ideological overtones did at times reassert themselves). We will see how Ortiz’s later works seek a vigorous revision of Cuban culture that shakes notions of nation at their

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5 Later in his study, the critic briefly mentions Ortiz, which is worth pointing to here. Beverley’s discussion traces transculturación, Ortiz’s pioneering cultural concept, and notes the subaltern echoes intrinsic to his academic discourse on the theme. “There is a hidden agenda of class and racial anxiety in Ortiz’s idea of transculturation…. The anxiety is over the possibility that racial and class violence from below will overturn the structure of privilege inhabited by an upper-class, liberal intellectual like Ortiz in a country like Cuba, where a majority of the population is ‘black’ (in U.S. terms) and, at least until the revolution, overwhelmingly poor (peasant, proletarian, or sub-proletarian)” (45).
center. In fact, these later premises aim to remedy questions of representing the subaltern in academic discourse by Ortiz’s erasure of racial distinctions in his definitive approach to the nation.6

Another component of any approximation towards Afrocuba entails representations of Afrocubans as spectacle, a concept Moore develops wholly in his study. His insight readily projects hegemony and subalternity onto the other formidable vehicle of Afrocuban representation: artistic expression. As the intricacies of nation-building followed the Republic’s trajectory, hegemonic motivations delegated Afrocuban representation as national. But the hegemonic rubric should query the motivations behind such representations. On this, Moore proposes two sides. First, a “successful nationalist movement redefines commonly held notions of self and society and constructs a new epistemological us vis-à-vis others. It enables certain groups to effectively represent their interests as those of the entire nation and to exclude alternate representations” (114). This view corresponds with national celebrations of Afrocuban art as genuinely positive to a cultural learning process, that is, a nation that is actively seeking to come to grips with the traditions of its subaltern traditions by embracing those art forms as nationally acceptable and self-defining. The critic positions these celebrations, however, within perhaps a more realistic recognition of the cultural undertones that surrounded expositions of Afrocuban song, dance, and other arts. “In the context of such cultural and racial antagonism, the meanings of afrocubanismo are decidedly ambivalent” (145). Racism was a persistent problem, and if some artistic and scientific figures proposed wholehearted celebrations of Afrocuba, others

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6 For continuity’s sake, we will leave these discussions for the latter part of Chapter Four. For now we can oversimplify: Ortiz’s last contributions to the discipline encouraged a deracialized vision of Cuba in which races were not only equal, but nonexistent. This is a brilliant manner of avoiding the problems intrinsic to portraying the subaltern in academic discourse, writing typically associated with the white Cuban economic, political, and scholarly elite.
raised equally formidable protests that intended to restrict the African to its previous subaltern status. Bronfman notes that scientific and artistic discourses regarding Afrocuba interfaced in interesting ways, as “a new politics of race emerged out of uneasy encounters between the languages of art and science” (165). The critic’s insight points to the discursive flux that surrounded Afrocuban Studies and artistry, and the various forces that were perpetuating the African’s intercalation into the national imaginary. Just as new invocations of Afrocuban heritage forged new political arenas – what she aptly dubs a “new politics of race” – so too did racism persist. Clearly, then, the integration of African symbols into Cuban nationalism garnered mixed reviews, and “if some whites responded with mistrust and violence to the presence of blacks in public life, some blacks responded with wariness and criticism of ascendant ideologies of Afrocubanismo and mestizaje” (165). Likewise, as Moore reminds us, Afrocubanismo “constitutes a new period of hegemonic concession in which black street culture is accepted, but only on European or middle-class terms” (146). Such contemporary contemplation on Cuban nation-building intricacies is rightfully suspect of the extent to which such traditions could be accepted in national circles. At the time, Ortiz himself was tiring of such racially-charged cultural dynamics, and, to repeat, it was amidst such a coexistence of racialized positions that he instigated a major ideological revision that sought to de-racialize national envisioning.

Our second series of theoretical considerations situates such representations of Cuba’s subaltern stratum within the evolving modes of science, what Kuhn classifies as changes in scientific paradigm. Ortiz’s centrality to Afrocuban Studies’ trajectory is well known, as the

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7 De la Fuente (2001) captures the cultural climate surrounding Afrocuban nationalism in an excellent study, which we cite frequently. See Chapter Four for a developed discussion of the racialized atmosphere surrounding Afrocuban figures.
bibliophile himself altered the discipline’s course, redirecting it over the years to the beat of multiple political, personal, and national drums. We have already seen how the role of academic discourse can determine the cultural positioning of Afrocuba with concepts of the nation. It would be insufficient, however, to point exclusively to the cultural results of such scientific practice. We must also consider the science itself. It is in this spirit that we dedicate the majority of this study to close readings of Ortiz’s treatment of the discipline – his disciplinary reflections, so to speak. As we outline Afrocuban Studies’ trajectory, it is most useful to examine Ortiz’s own comments on how the discipline’s scientific precepts evolved. Fortunately, Ortiz was quite vocal on these matters, as he regularly offered snippets on Afrocuban Studies, his own research, and that of others. One of Kuhn’s central points in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* is how new scientific theories build upon such factors as anomaly and crisis. If new theories emerge in times of crisis, they are completed and revamped afterwards. In this way, crisis facilitates scientific revolution, in turn inciting national progress. Science, then, is fully tied to nation; cycles of national crisis/progress correspond to cycles of scientific advancement. This could not be more applicable to Ortiz, Afrocuban Studies, and Republican Cuba’s momentum toward scientific modernity. If the Afrocuban ‘crisis’ of the new Republic engendered new scientific methodologies of approaching Cuban race matters, changing political attitudes ushered in timely revisions of such practice. Thus, as the *brujo* fracas subsided, Ortiz himself altered methods of tackling national race issues. Likewise, in response to the political upheaval and changing cultural concepts of the 1930s, Ortiz overhauled once again his scientific approximation to Afrocuba, each time revolutionizing his treatises and bringing his discourse up to date.
Our last theoretical consideration of Afrocuba reverts directly to notions of nation, nationhood, and nation-building. We are concerned with portraying how the nation-building scheme incorporated the African and the tangible effects of such re-conceptualization.

Documenting this scenario as it unfolded, essayist Alberto Arredondo (1912-1968) offers us key insight into the formative nation-building processes. In *El negro en Cuba* [*The Black in Cuba*] (1939), Arredondo discloses how the two dissimilar concepts – *el negro* and *la nación* – began to assimilate into a single cultural signifier in the 1930s. “El negro y la nacionalidad cubana no se excluyen. Son ambos factores de una misma ecuación” [“The black and Cuban nationality do not exclude each other. Each is a factor in the same equation”] (37). The work’s tone is conciliatory, and phrases such as this appear throughout Arredondo’s musings, which on the whole implore Cubans to acknowledge the African’s role within the nation’s most central developments.8 Dovetailing with one of Ortiz’s prominent positions, which we outline in Chapter Four, the likening of *negro* and *nación* is a nationalist plea for reconciliation – for fusing Cuba and Afrocuba. Implanting his essay with a scientific approach to Afrocuban nation-building, Arredondo turns to the task of defining the nation. He tries to demonstrate two takes on the concept:

La nación, según algunos tratadistas, reside y consiste en la comunidad territorial, lingüística, religiosa, racial y de cultura que vincula a un determinado núcleo humano. Y según otros, más ajustados a la Ley dialéctica de la evolución histórica, ‘la nación está constituida históricamente por hombres que unen la

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8 His methodology for the completion of such a task is quite simple. Arredondo looks at *el negro y la nación* in many of Cuba’s nation-defining moments from a variety of theoretical frames: economics, social history, religious history, politics, to name a few.
[The nation, according to some thinkers, resides in and consists of territorial, linguistic, religious, racial, and cultural community that connects a determined human nucleus. And according to others, closer to the dialectical law of historical evolution, ‘the nation is historically constituted by men who unite the unities of language, territory, economic life, and psychic mentality that is manifested in the unity of culture’]. (37)

Less significant here is that one concept of nation mentions “race” as one of its delineators while the other does not; one evokes “economic life” as definitive of a nation while the other fails to do so. What intrigues here is that as Arredondo flirts with inconsistent definitional approaches to the nation and nation-building, the remainder of his essay sets out to prove Cuba’s black heritage as equally viable and integral to the nation. To do so, Arredondo picks apart each of the categories disclosed in the two definitions and, for each, muses about how in Cuba, negros and blancos have contributed their fair share to currents of national progress. His final point is to mitigate black and white national histories, conveniently ignoring slavery and starting with the first war of independence, into a Cuban “fusion” of African and Hispanic economic, religious, linguistic, and racial traditions: instead of being displaced by white hegemony, “el negro no sólo forma parte de la Nación, sino que fue factor transcendental en la integración de sus unidades determinantes” [“the negro not only forms part of the Nation, he was also a transcendental factor in the integration of its determinative unities”] (52). Such an assertion was doubtless shocking.
for post-Machado and pre-Batista audiences, who might have scoffed at such frank declarations of blacks as so positively integral to Cuba’s historical development.

It is not surprising that Arredondo infused his study with a conciliatory edge, much as Ortiz did in those same years.⁹ “Creemos que mientras blancos y negros no se responsabilicen conscientemente, con el imperativo de su rol histórico y mientras no marchen conjuntamente a la solución de problemas que afectan preponderantemente a la nacionalidad, tanto el blanco como el negro seguirán sufriendo los rigores de la injusticia social” [“We think that as long as blacks and whites do not take conscious responsibility of the imperativeness of their historical role and as long as they do not march together toward the solution of problems that crucially affect nationality, both blacks and whites will continue suffering the rigors of social injustice”] (170). Juxtaposing sympathy and petition, Arredondo equates blacks and whites, reckoning that both will suffer as long as they do not “take conscious responsibility” for national issues. His premise is a theoretically significant one in that it negates the constructs we have outlined in anticipation of our examination of Ortiz’s work and that of his followers. There is neither hegemony nor subalternity to speak of in his solution. He sets aside those national realities and opts for a uniting entreaty. He imagines such unity in his vision, a strategy that resonates with a contemporary nation-building theorist like Anderson, who insists that the nation construct is an “imagined community.” Indeed, Anderson’s further elucidation fits nicely with Arredondo’s premise. “Nation,” he states, is “imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible” (7). If such “fraternity” allows the imagined nation to be as such, then the task of the Afrocuban nationalist

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⁹ See our discussion of Ortiz’s post-exile positions on the role of races, afrocubanidad, and Afrocuban cultural celebrations in the Republic in Chapters Three and Four of this study.
becomes a daunting one. What Arredondo highlights in his essay – and Ortiz gets to and eventually surpasses over the course of a long-drawn-out career – is precisely the kind of national healing that must occur for the racialized nation to be conceived as an “imagined community.”

One contemporary hispanist has stated that constructing a nation “implies a narrative… of what is being built” (West 3). We have attempted to outline the overarching theoretical issues that could impact such a writing. While tracing concepts such as hegemony, or visiting figures like Gramsci and Beverley provide insights into the discursive intricacies of this process, we must make an important concession. If constructing the nation “implies a narrative,” then Ortiz’s voluminous narratives constructed a nation over and over. With each of his works, as he revolutionized Afrocuban science, he disseminated new concepts of Cuban nationhood. Considered as a whole or examined closely, Ortiz’s work – and persona – correlated to a nation-writing compendium that, as we shall see in the next section, summoned what Santí has dubbed a misión cultural [cultural mission] (Contrapunteo 2002: 39).

The political trajectory of Fernando Ortiz

Given that a number of scholars have already achieved comprehensive readings of Ortiz’s professional, political, academic, and personal progressions, rehearsing such a trajectory becomes unnecessary. Far more useful would be to pinpoint those moments that coincide with our textual readings in later chapters – moments that express disciplinary reflection, Ortiz’s revealing comments on the interplay between the role of Afrocuban Studies within the nation. Ortiz’s early professional years partake of what Santí posits as “the double gaze,” a time when the scholar’s commute between Spain and Cuba granted both a reflecting distance and internal
access to the cultural and political workings of pre-Republican Cuba (Contrapunteo 2002: 36). Through this positional privilege Ortiz cemented the foundational bases of his fledgling career as a cultural critic, a career that partook of various facets early on: “además de una triple trayectoria como escritor, abogado y diplomático, Ortiz se destaca, a su regreso definitivo a La Habana, como criminólogo” [“aside from a triple trajectory of writer, lawyer, and diplomat, Ortiz sets himself apart, upon his definitive return to Havana, as a criminologist”] (36). As we will see in Chapter Two, the prerogatives stemming from such a quadruple career craft the scholar’s political motivations in Los negros brujos (1906). The Republican powers-that-be made much use of Ortiz’s background. For his first book thrust him onto the Cuban political scene and ushered in a lengthy career as diputado and vice-president of the Cámara. Given the nature of Ortiz’s constantly morphing trajectory, though, it should be no surprise that these early disciplinary motivations were quickly left behind for new discursive approaches to Cuba and Afrocuba, and as Castellanos states, although “los primeros trabajos del bisoño etnógrafo se hacen en el campo de la antropología criminal y sobre la base de una doctrina perfectamente formada” [“the first works of this ethnographic novice are done in the field of criminal anthropology and over the base of a perfectly formed doctrine”], Ortiz was bound by the tenets of Lombrosian criminology only “por un cortísimo período de tiempo” [“for a very short period of time”] (2003: 112). 10

By the 1920s, Ortiz’s political presence was established and he frequented the nation’s reformist elite. Participating in the “Liberal Left,” he made it his mission to reform Cuban government. In Santí’s words, “Ortiz se identifica con lo que se conoce como la Izquierda Liberal, grupo relativamente joven dentro de su partido que buscaba la reforma gubernamental. 10

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10 We will outlay Lombroso’s conceptualization of criminology – and Ortiz’s reception of it – in Chapter Two in conjunction with our analysis of Los negros brujos.
Pero al margen de su actividad política prosigue su misión cultural” [“Ortiz identifies himself with what is known as the Liberal Left, a relatively young group within his party that looked for governmental reform. But at the margin of his political activity he carries his cultural mission onward”] (39). As the critic reminds us, no matter the intensity of Ortiz’s political involvements, his “cultural mission” continued to form, all the while resulting in significant contributions to Afrocuban scholarship through essays, glossaries, speeches, publication of journals, leadership of prominent elitist societies, and early initiatives at folklore compilation. These are the years that preceded intense celebrations of Afrocuba in music, poetry, and fictional narrative. In Chapter Three, we examine how Ortiz’s key scholarly enterprise of this time, *Archivos del Folklore Cubano* (1924-1930), foreran such cultural celebrations of Afrocuban artistry in its redirection of national ideals and, what is more, how the role of folkloric research piloted that quest. During that same period, which coincided with Gerardo Machado’s elected presidency and dictatorship, Ortiz’s life changed on professional, political, and personal fronts. We turn to Santí for a concise review of these years: “Si las circunstancias personales de Ortiz cambian a lo largo de esos años (en 1926 pierde a su esposa y queda viudo con una hija), Cuba a su vez pierde la confianza en sus gobernantes. El propio Ortiz renuncia a su puesto de diputado en 1927” [“If Ortiz’s personal circumstances change over the course of these years (in 1926 he loses his wife and is left widowed with a daughter), Cuba likewise loses confidence in its leadership. Ortiz himself renounces his delegate post in 1927”] (43). Santí makes clear how Ortiz’s political inclinations quickly responded to the national climate. As that climate changed, Ortiz removed himself from office and redirected his public presence. Castellanos reviews the underlying ideological changes occurring in Ortiz as this political situation unfolds. We will examine in Chapter Four Ortiz’s own reflections upon his work during these years, including the changes his work took on
after his 1934 return to Cuba from exile in Washington, D.C. For now, though, Castellanos’ summary is useful for contextualization’s sake. “En los años finales de los Veinte y en la década del Treinta, la obra de Ortiz comienza a reflejar las transformaciones que iban produciéndose en su óptica investigativa y en sus concepciones teóricas. El proceso puede resumirse en una breve fórmula: el penólogo es finalmente sustituido por el antropólogo y etnólogo” [“In the final years of the 1920s and the decade of the 1930s, Ortiz’s work starts to reflect the transformations that were ongoing in his investigative lens and in his theoretical conceptualizations. The process can be summarized formulaically: the criminologist is finally replaced by the anthropologist and the ethnologist”] (128). While anthropological tenets did manipulate Ortiz’s work prior to this time, Castellanos notes how Ortiz’s turn went from scholarship that sought to change the nation, to scholarship that sought to celebrate *afrocubanidad*, a change that in effect substituted criminology with ethnography.\(^\text{11}\) Chapters Two to Four discuss this change, which is also touched upon in Chapter Five in terms of the artistic work of Ortiz’s disciples and nation-building colleagues.

It is Santí’s estimation that the division in Ortiz’s life and career became clear. “Podría decirse que, en la biografía intelectual de Ortiz, como en la de muchos de su generación, la vida se divide en dos: antes y después de Machado. El Ortiz post-Machado, más escéptico, se aleja de la política y se dedica de lleno a sus investigaciones – sobre todo a las que tienen que ver con el tema afrocubano” [“It could be said that, in Ortiz’s intellectual biography, as in that of many of his generation, life was divided in two parts: before and after Machado. The post-Machcado Ortiz, more skeptic, distances himself from politics and is dedicated wholly to his research – above all those that embrace the Afrocuban theme”] (46). Machado divided Ortiz into two.

\(^{11}\) Actually, Ortiz later surpasses even the disciplinary constraints of anthropology and ethnology in his groundbreaking considerations of Cuban race in nonracial terms. See Chapter Four.
Thus after exile, “Ortiz redefine su vida pública, en parte sin duda debido a la desilusión que sintió con la traición de Machado (vale decir, de la vida política) a sus ilusiones reformistas” [“Ortiz redefines his public life, in doubtless part due to the disenchantment that he felt with Machado’s treason (it is worth saying, with political life) to his reformist illusions”] (46). It is such that the final stages of Ortiz’s career, now more focused on academics and more officially distanced from politics, seek to reformulate Cuban conceptions of race and nation.\(^{12}\) Though we will examine the textual ramifications of Ortiz’s altered ideological approach to Afrocuba, and the African’s place within the nation, Castellanos’s synthesis is also useful.

Al despejarse la atmósfera investigativa con la creciente evaporación de los prejuicios, comenzaron a saltar a la vista las verdades que antes los prejuicios ocupaban. Se produce una revalorización positiva de la cultura afrocubana, a la que no se le ve ya como una lamentable expresión del atavismo salvaje de unas masas de delincuentes sino como el válido modo de vida de amplios sectores de la sociedad. (133)

[Upon clearing up the investigative atmosphere with the increasing evaporation of prejudice, the truths that prejudices occupied before began to come into view. A positive revalorization of Afrocuban culture is produced, which is no longer seen as a lamentable expression of the savage atavism of some delinquent masses, but rather as a valid way of life in both sectors of society]. (133)

\(^{12}\) As we will point out over the course of this study, it is nearly impossible to divorce Ortiz from politics at nearly all points of his career, though the Ortiz “before and after Machado” are markedly different in terms of official roles.
Ortiz’s research during these years seeks to complete the folkloric calls of the 1920s by means of specific academic activities, namely musicology. The musicological enterprise, coupled with his mulatto vision of Cuba as presented in *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* [*Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*] (1940) and his subsequent re-visioning of Cuban racial constructs in *El engaño de las razas* [*The Deceit of the Races*] (1946; examined with much detail in Chapter Four), formulate a career end radically different from its origins. It was then that Ortiz honed his “mulatto vision” and placed academic research at the service of healing the nation. Duno (2004) notes that Ortiz’s vision of Cuba as a mulatto construct is upheld by two concepts: *ajiaco* and *transculturación*; the stew metaphor for Cuba and Ortiz’s landmark coinage. We examine the former in Chapter Four. The latter rears its head occasionally in this study and does more than provide a telling introductory understanding of Ortiz’s life work. It aptly describes the Cuban racial scenario in biological and social terms, and for that reason (among others) Ortiz’s concept was so incisive.

Transculturation is the conceptual mechanism whereby Ortiz addressed, scientifically and metaphorically, Cuba’s racial miscegenation in historical and contemporary terms. In Ortiz’s words, “[h]emos escogido el vocablo transculturación para expresar los variadísimos fenómenos que se originan en Cuba por las complejísimas trasmutaciones de culturas que aquí se verifican,… La verdadera historia de Cuba es la historia de sus intricadísimas transculturaciones” [“we have chosen the term transculturation to express the varied phenomena that originate in Cuba on account of the very complex cultural transmutations that are verified here…. The true history of Cuba is that of its intricate transculturations”] (*Contrapunteo* 2003: 254).  

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13 We would be remiss not to mention the greater polemic(s) surrounding the term’s advent amidst heated anthropological debates of the time in both North American and European circles. The neologism sought to account for incompleteness in previous ‘cultural contact’ terminologies,
here how the social (national) motivation surpasses the scientific one; Ortiz is addressing, through the scientific rubric of *transculturación*, contemporary and historical issues plaguing Cuban society. *Transculturación* is the means by which Ortiz directs himself, in Duno’s words, “al problema de la heterogeneidad conflictiva de la nación” [“to the problem of the nation’s conflicting heterogeneity”] (147). If Ortiz’s construct heralded a fundamental anthropological advance (a revolution of scientific paradigm), its insight into the complexities of the racialized Cuban nation evokes equally vital metaphors to that effect. This leads Duno to observe that “[l]as sabrosas metáforas de Ortiz y sus ingeniosos neologismos constituyen una respuesta liberal, reformista y conciliadora a los conflictos étnicos de la nación cubana. Constituyen un intento por nombrar – que es dar existencia – lo que se quiere concebir como una nación mestiza” [“Ortiz’s flavorful metaphors and ingenious neologisms constitute a liberal, reformist, and conciliatory response to the ethnic conflicts of the Cuban nation. They constitute an intent to name – to give existence to – that which is conceived as a *mestiza* nation”] (155). Ortiz infuses meditation on the “mestizo nation” into every page of *Contrapunteo*, and no matter the thematic parameter, he manages to link the scientific camp to meditations on Cuba’s social problems surrounding racial exploitation. Such close nexus between science and nation makes it difficult to sustain that Ortiz ever really left Republican politics. According to Castellanos,

> la obra científica de Fernando Ortiz desborda los marcos de lo estrictamente etnográfico o antropológico para adquirir una vigorosa significación política, en el sentido más puro y amplio del término. Aunque comienza lastrado de prejuicios, Ortiz sistemáticamente los elimina y supera, hasta convertirse en líder indiscutible

namely acculturation and deculturation. See Santí (2003) for a detailed discussion of the actors and debates in this scenario.
de la lucha contra el racismo y en incansable batallador por el derecho del negro a la igualdad política, económica y social. (151)

[Ortiz’s scientific work goes beyond the frames of the strictly ethnographical or anthropological in order to acquire a vigorous political significance, in the most pure and wide sense of the term. Although he begins ballasted by prejudices, Ortiz systematically eliminates and surpasses them, even converting himself into an indisputable leader of the fight against racism and into a tireless battler for the black right in political, economic, and social equality]. (151)

Ortiz goes full circle: from politics to science to politics again, all the while amalgamating the two into an intricate nationalist apparatus. While politics and science are inextricable from the fashioning of Afrocuba throughout the whole of Ortiz’s nation-building efforts, their differing significations between 1906 and 1957 constitute signposts along Afrocuban Studies’ thoroughfare. A life of juggling science and politics engendered a discipline and correspondingly propagated new definitions of national culture.

**Artistic (r)evolution**

The sampling of literary figures (literary in the artistic sense) we will examine in Chapter Five fits the bill of Afrocuban Studies in its diversity, contradiction, multiplicity, and its pre-definitional stigmas. First, very few of the Afrocuban artists we will examine are Afrocubans themselves. Second, constraints on the genres and textual formats of Afrocuban literature appear to be nonexistent; novels, short narratives, poetry, and collected oral legends vary remarkably in narrative mode, theme, style, length, and language. We will analyze a sampling of narrative,
verse, and essays on their formulation attempting to pinpoint Afrocuban literature’s most consistent features.

Ortiz was precise in his instructions to Cuba’s budding folklorists. We shall see how some literary figures stylized their work according to the anthropologist’s precepts, while others ignore, even discard, Ortiz’s scientific tutelage. The contradictions that make up Afrocuban literature’s corpus cannot be emphasized enough. Issues of position – on or from of Afrocuba – and genre – art vs. science – are symptoms of a more fundamental question: what are Afrocuban literary texts? Posing such a question seems futile enough; answering it, far more disheartening. And yet it is precisely this type of inquiry that goes to the heart of what constitutes Afrocuban literature. We will see, for instance, that, Lydia Cabrera and Rómulo Lachatañeré succeeded at narrating from ‘within’ Afrocuba: their narratives, though composed in standard Spanish, capture certain qualities – qualities that ‘seem African’ – syntactical speed, narrative ambiguity, religious/legendary tones, and fantastic themes, all of which convey a seemingly Afrocuban worldview. On the other hand, a fledgling novelist like Alejo Carpentier in 1927 resorts to portraying Afrocuba in ‘Western’ terms – that is on Afrocuba: standard narrative perspectives, typical narrative formats (sequential dialogues, third-person descriptive contextualization, etc.), and ideologically problematic portrayals that situate Afrocuban characters along clearly white lines.\textsuperscript{14} Such stylistic implications leave Afrocuban culture seekers dissatisfied in their privileging of the Western over the African.\textsuperscript{15} The contrast is equally sustainable in Afrocuban poetry. Nicolás Guillén, for example, writes his musical poetry as if it were ritual song/dance

\textsuperscript{14} Carpentier’s adherence to the avant-garde breaks, on some level, with traditional (realist) novelistic convention and, in so doing, at times evoke such auras of non-Western ‘Africanness.’ For an excellent recap of the novelistic processes converging in Carpentier’s earlier works see González Echevarría (1977).

\textsuperscript{15} This is not to Carpentier’s liking, as he makes clear in many essays on the matter, all of which we discuss in Chapter Five.
and his social poetry from an unmistakably African/mulatto perspective. Conversely, Guirao offers ‘Western,’ Hispanic poetic stylizations and only rarely captures an Afrocuban worldview through limited linguistic imitation or ritual reenactment.

There is another factor that comes into play. If Ortiz is the focal point of this study, we propose that the artistry examined can pertain to two rudimentary classifications: (1) literature that was conceived under Ortiz’s scholarly tutelage and (2) literature that was construed independently of such disciplinary interaction. Lachatañeré worked closely with Ortiz for many years; the two engendered groundbreaking polemics for Afrocuban Studies, ranging from discussions of artistry to revising troublesome ideologies. And though Ortiz gave her fiction a veritable scientific stamp of approval, Lydia Cabrera made much effort to distance herself from Afrocuba’s scientific discourse, though a readily sustainable contradiction arises when one considers her academic offerings to Afrocuban Studies.

Several essayists of the time addressed the logistics of the Afrocuban thematic, Afrocuba’s place among international narrative and poetic styles, and the literary richness that the Afrocuban presents for artists. Scholar-poets such as Emilio Ballagas, Juan Marinello, and Ramón Guirao equate to simultaneous clarifiers of and catalysts to Afrocuban artistic expression. Their essays point to the richness of the Afrocuban thematic and thereby attempt to bring order to the aesthetics of Afrocuban poetry. However, embodying the emblematic contradictions of all things Afrocuban, these figures outlay an Afrocuban style in terms of clearly Western aesthetics, consequently calling into question the cultural mechanisms at play. No matter the difficulties of grouping these essayists and poets within a unified front, each meditates extensively on the Afrocuban artistic process – ‘Afrocuban’ in the freest sense of the term. For all of these figures were Cuban whites – and therefore provided insight into the artistic rendering of Afrocuba. As
they write on African style, their national value as viable art, and Afrocuba’s potential aesthetics, each staked out a position on the science-art spectrum.

We hope to make clear that we are not stressing a cause-and-effect relationship between Ortiz’s scholarship and *Afrocubanismo*. Clearly, the Afrocuban artistic craze necessarily drew from sources that went well beyond Ortiz’s purview.\(^{16}\) Rather, it is important to consider how each of these ingredients was amassed within the nation-building apparatus; how each forged a national recognition for Afrocuba in a different way. Though Ortiz and *afrocubanistas* might have coincided variously, the vast majority of Afrocuban artists, as Moore sustains, were non-intellectuals who participated in music crazes such as *jazz, son*, and *rumba*. A host of others made no efforts at connecting with Ortiz; others still even made overt efforts to distance themselves from Ortiz’s scholarly reach. Our focus in this study will be speculative, always preempted by the complicated framework of such considerations. The particulars of such scientific and artistic currents notwithstanding, we hope to make clear how each of these camps – in and out of Ortiz’s reach – fashioned Afrocuba.

**Beyond Ortiz**

As a matter of thematic focus, our study remains chronologically tied to Republican Cuba. It does not venture to consider Afrocuban Studies during the last forty-five years, since the advent of the Castro Revolution (1959-). Nonetheless, issues surrounding Afrocuba have most certainly come to light in the latter context. In their critical anthology of Afrocuban studies, revolutionary Afrocuba authorities Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs note, for example, that “[a]fter 1959, the race question was almost entirely subsumed under a broadly redemptive

\(^{16}\) For example, Parisian *art nègre*, which we address fully in Chapter Three.
nationalist, and subsequently socialist, umbrella. Significantly, the slogan ‘neither black nor Red’ formed part of a white backlash against major redistributive measures in the early revolutionary years. Even before socialism had been proclaimed, racism and anti-communism were being equated” (1993: 9). It seems that the revolution brought with it a less “official” focus on race and, in tune with Marxist-Leninist socialism, a narrower focus on class. Stubbs and Pérez Sarduy reason that Cuba became ‘more African’ as the Castro regime continued:

“[d]emographically and socio-culturally, Cuba is far less white after three decades of revolution than it was in 1959. The initial exodus of the 1960s was predominately Hispanic and monied. That of 1980 and since have been more mixed, but out of a population that many believe is far more mulatto than census figures suggest” (10). Though officially racial classifications were to have disappeared with the revolution’s advent, the same critics note that the “pervasiveness of racism should not be underestimated. The problems facing blacks in revolutionary Cuba cannot be ignored, pretending that they will go away. Neither should blacks’ own revolutionary history be underestimated; blacks have in the past taken history into their own hands. Today Cuba has a blacker population than it did in 1959, a more educated black population, and one with a growing sense of pride in being black as well as in being Cuban” (26). It would seem that Ortiz’s latest concepts of race – revolutionary in and of themselves – did not permeate the post-1959 scenario, as racism in Cuba does persist, and, though masked by revolutionary dogmatism, inequality and hegemony continue to hamper the Afro Cuban experience.17

Hence our choice to designate a specific timeframe for this study, which maneuvers our focus solely among Cuba’s Republican years. It is not our intent to ignore the revolutionary implications of Afro Cuba. However, to consider Afro Cuban Studies after 1959 would go well

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beyond our scope. In the first place, transforming our examinations into a study that covers the entire twentieth century would involve a host of historical and theoretical premises that go well beyond Ortiz. Indeed, though he lived one full decade after the Republic’s end, Ortiz’s most substantial work fits within a pre-revolutionary trajectory. Additionally, *afrocuabanismo*, Cuban narrative and poetry, plus the plethora of scientific studies on Afrocuba, had all fizzled by the end of the 1950s. By then, the material that repeatedly came to the forefront of national issues, in the course of some two decades, had changed significantly. For this reason we have chosen to confine our study between the years 1906 and 1957, two key dates for Afrocuban Studies. 1906 marks Ortiz’s entrance into the discipline – and, some would say, the contemporary discipline’s inauguration – with *Los negros brujos*, his most condemning treatise on Afrocuba. Lydia Cabrera’s last pre-revolutionary contribution to the discipline, *Anagó: vocabulario lucumí* (1957), is a substantial part of an immense corpus of Afrocuban scholarship. It seems fitting that these pivotal dates embrace ideologically polarized disciplinary tenets. For as we will learn over the course of this study, the constancy of Afrocuban Studies lies only in its inconstancy. In fashioning Afrocuba, the same could be said of Ortiz himself, whose scientific trajectory, after all, branded twentieth-century Afrocuban ethnography as a constant “work-in-progress.”

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18 In the future, we would like to further contextualize Afrocuban Studies by examining pre- and post-Republican considerations. It is imprudent to ignore the corpus of scholarship directed toward the nation and its Africans during slavery. We will address these issues to some degree in our discussion of *Los negros esclavos [The Black Slaves]* (1916) in Chapter Two. Though such figures as Saco, del Monte, and Villaverde treated Afrocuba in both scholarship and creative writing, the political context was markedly different. The same applies for post-Republican Afrocuban matters.
Chapter Two, *Hampa afro-cubana*: The Scientific Trajectory of Afrocuba (1906-1928)

This chapter attempts to trace the treatment of scientific inquiry in *Hampa afro-cubana* [Afrocuban Underworld] (1906, 1916, 1926-28), Ortiz’s most salient scholarly project during his career’s formative stages. Scientific methodology in the series often takes the form of commentary on investigative practice and Afrocuban Studies’ disciplinary meditation. Such passages in *Hampa* address science directly by way of theoretical conceptualization, explanation of research methodology, and commentary on contemporary Afrocuban social issues through historical documentation. Reading the *Hampa* trilogy for the discourse directed at the convention of scientific inquiry sheds light on the trajectory of twentieth-century Afrocuban Studies, just as much as it outlays the mainstays of Ortiz’s early political, juridical, and scholarly career.

To address Ortiz’s career’s beginning, it is quite useful to consider a piece of his famous end-of-career reflection. In his 1955 farewell speech to *La Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País* [The Economic Society of Friends of the Country], Ortiz reassured his colleagues that science was the conduit by which Cuba could realize the most formidable progress. The remarks, aptly titled “Más y más fe en la ciencia” [“More and More Faith in Science”], confirmed Ortiz’s Positivist convictions, which we will map out shortly. “Viví, leí, escribí, publiqué, siempre apresurado y sin sosiego porque la fronda cubana era muy espesa y casi inexplorada, y yo con mis pocas fuerzas no podía hacer sino abrir alguna trocha e intentar derroteros. Y así ha sido toda mi vida. Nada más” [“I lived, I read, I wrote, I published, ever hastily and anxiously, for the Cuban frond was indeed thick and almost unexplored, and my few efforts do no more than only open a single path and attempt to guide you. Such has been my
entire life. Nothing more”] (47). Ortiz’s self-reflection is at once accurate and modest. The vast quantity of written work he put forth equated to a compendium of Cuban erudition, including, among others, studies of history, culture, politics, law, criminology, linguistics, ethnology, ethnography, anthropology, and music. Just as this truly exhaustive written catalog forged many “paths” of Cuban scholarship (indeed, many more so than the speaker admits to in his unpretentious remarks), Ortiz inaugurated critical treatments of material not previously considered as viable scholarship. It is no surprise that Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs hail Ortiz as “the point of reference” for Afrocuban ethnography (2000: 19).

Central to his “faith in science” is Ortiz’s focus on the scientific discovery yet to occur within the “Cuban frond.” This notion dovetails nicely with his famous culinary rendering of Cuba as an ajiaco, a stew of numerous heritages, each being an important component of national identity worthy of scientific approximation.19 His speech continues:

[A]quí se encuentran, concordes y unidos en un mismo anhelo humano, muy prominentes científicos y literatos, renombradas personalidades en los altos niveles de la cultura, y muy humildes y anónimos supervivientes de las culturas iletradas; los cuales con su arte primitivo y los cánticos sacromágicos de sus abolengos, han traído a esta asamblea las voces de los siglos pasados, que aún

19 In “América es un ajiaco” (1940), Ortiz contends that “Cuba is a stew” (21). This metaphor of the different ingredients in Cuba’s cultural makeup postulates that each component is equally valuable as national heritage. The article comes from a speech given at the University of Havana, also published in Estudios Afrocubanos as “La cubanidad y los negros” [“Cubanness and the Blacks”] (1939). The earlier title correlates more specifically with the theme of Afrocuban nation-building. Of this notion, Gustavo Pérez Firmat states that “[l]ike Cuba, Ortiz is always cooking, and his work never does reach a neoculturative synthesis. When he asserts that the ‘deferral of consolidation’ is a characteristic of Cuban culture [in “América es un ajiaco”] the phrase applies equally to his own texts, which also defer consolidation” (52).
salen de las entrañas de nuestro pueblo, gimiendo dolores y cantando esperanzas.

(49)

[[Here we find, united in the same human yearning, very prominent scientists and literary scholars, renown personalities of high culture, and quite humble and anonymous survivors of the unlettered cultures; whom with their primitive art and the sacred/magic chants of their lineage, have brought to this assembly the voices of centuries past, that still emerge from the insides of our country, moaning in pain and chanting hope]. (49)

All cultures in Cuba – lettered/unlettered, past/progressive, white/black – merit scientific study. In fact, juxtaposing such differing *ajiaco* components makes their documentation and understanding all the more beneficial for the “assembly” of national interest convening in the *Sociedad Económica*. As Ortiz attempted to address his life’s ambition in national terms, it is worth repeating that he made such a statement at the end of his career. One could of course contend that all facets of Ortiz’s life and work served the “faith in science” ideal and its data-gathering precepts. But one cannot ignore the differing ideological undercurrents that distinguish his career’s end from its beginning. Though scientific ideals were a constant drive of Ortiz’s mission, propagating the Afrocuban as a bastion of national culture was not embraced in his early work. And while the very magnitude of Ortiz’s scholarly enterprise specifies that a “faith in science” did guide him always, some stages did not entail an explicit advocacy of Afrocuban heritage. What did remain constant, however, was science. In a Kuhnian change of scientific paradigm, we must approach the ever-increasing Afrocuban celebrations put forth by
Ortiz as a life-long process of revolutionizing scientific study. Ortiz was, after all, inventive in his scientific attention to Cuba’s Africans, even when his studies were condemning of that heritage.

Keeping this in mind, any consideration of Ortiz’s scholarship would be remiss to exclude reflection upon its changing ideological undercurrents, the keys to understanding the scientific revolutions inspired by the ethnographer. Just as the place of Afrocubans in the national imaginary differed in 1906 and 1955, so did the thrust of Ortiz’s work change course over those same years. In 1906 the criminologist had yet to become a central figure in national politics. By 1955, however, the scholar had altered the political motives that compromised his vision of Afrocuban heritage as central to the ajiaco model; as central to the nation.

What is Hampa afro-cubana?

Any analysis of Hampa afro-cubana is mottled by numerous categorical and ideological constraints that prohibit concise depiction. The published volumes in the series include Los negros brujos [The Black Witches] (1906), Los negros esclavos [The Black Slaves] (1916), and Los negros curros [The Black Gangsters] (1926-28). These texts were to be supplemented by at least two other manuscripts which never saw press: Los negros horros [The Freed Blacks] and Los negros ñáñigos [The Black Priests]. The documentary undertaking of Hampa was so massive that Ortiz left it unfinished, though perhaps not unresolved. To complicate matters,

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20 In The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, Kuhn remarks that “when paradigms change, the world changes with them. Led by a new paradigm, scientists adopt new instruments and look in new places” (111). In post-slavery Cuba, the paradigm by which scientists and politicians alike examined Afrocubans was necessarily different than it was prior to 1886. What is more, Ortiz’s own scientific paradigm changes over the course of his work, as is made evident by the differing scientific treatments of Afrocuban subjects in 1906 and 1955, for example.
Ortiz, on more than one occasion, promised revisions that were never completed. Pérez Firmat notes a “preliminary, unfinished quality” in Ortiz’s work, a style that is “nowhere more evident than in his research into Afro-Cuban folklore” (51). While it is perhaps overkill to classify Ortiz’s production with a sweeping categorization (“rough drafts,” as the critic alludes later in the passage), Pérez Firmat’s observation is nonetheless insightful as it does point to the fluctuating, imprecise nature of the Hampa venture: “Adding up to several books and dozens of articles, the Hampa afro-cubana (the project’s collective title) may serve as an emblem of the constitutive incompleteness of Ortiz’s completed works” (51).

Not only does the textual makeup of Hampa obscure straightforward classification. The purpose of the enterprise also seems to waver between assorted unfixed premises that render ineffectual any generalization about the treatises’ proposals. Each text is generally constrained in its thesis: Brujos examines the post-1898 phenomenon of Afrocuban witchery; Esclavos offers a historical synthesis of the Cuban slave system and attempts to translate that system onto twentieth-century social analyses; Curros documents an extinct Colonial street tradition and puts forth less connection with contemporary ethnography. Though unified in their loose organization around Afrocuban themes, their individual thematic specificity allows them to stand by themselves. What is more, the texts were not released with any chronological proximity, but rather over a period of some twenty years, and Ortiz worked on some of the studies for up to sixty years (Pérez Firmat 51). Given such professional longevity and topical span, it seems fitting that we briefly revisit the idea of Ortiz’s changing public figure over these years. For just as the project lacks chronological congruence, Ortiz’s multifaceted scholarship also hampers ideological coherence. Even if the ideological evolution of the scholar is a matter that will be

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21 Consider the prologue to Esclavos (1916), which we will examine later in this chapter.
addressed repeatedly in this study, for the purposes of initial approximation, we must, simply, treat any notion of *Hampa* with the same amount of skepticism with which we consider the contradictions implanted within Ortiz’s career. These considerations become all the more intriguing when we consider why *Horros* and *Ñáñigos* were never completed. What was the ideological position of these two texts? What were they critical of? When were they to be published? While prefaces to the existing manuscripts indicate that the uncompleted texts in the series were in their formative stages as early as 1916, perhaps their ideological position was already obsolete by the time they were ready for press. Or, perhaps they were merely left unfinished for reasons of time. Although bordering on futile, these deliberations are keys for grasping the fluid nature of the ‘trilogy.’

Ortiz’s selection of the term *hampa* as the series’ unifying theme is also problematic. According to nineteenth-century Spanish criminologist Rafael Salillas (1855-1923), a direct disciplinary inspiration for young Ortiz, *hampa* is that social vein that encompasses “gypsies, thieves, and ruffians.” Ortiz’s use of the model is important for coming to grips with the ideological premises governing the series, as the lens by which he examines Afrocuba is overarchingly criminological and, at least initially, manifests Afrocuban cultural practice as akin to evolutionary inferiority. Such postulations, evident at the series’ onset, counter the disciplinary perspectives guiding Ortiz’s 1955 remarks. In reference to *Hampa*’s initial

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22 We plan to do away with such speculation in future analyses of Ortiz’s work by closely examining the pamphlet manuscripts of the unrealized texts.

23 Indeed, even the “trilogy” delineation is cumbersome. In this study, the term “trilogy” will refer to the three published manuscripts of *Hampa*.

24 Salillas, Rafael. *El delincuente español: Hampa. Antología picaresca*. [The Spanish Delinquent: Criminal Underworld. Picaresque Anthology]. Madrid, 1898. Thomas Bremer states that “In 1898, the study of ‘criminogenic’ content in picaresque novels came out, from which Ortiz even borrowed the main title for his planned collection of a total of six investigations, namely, *Hampa*, the rather uncommon Spanish word meaning, according to Salillas, the ‘género de vida’ of the ‘gitanos, ladrones y rufianes’” (127).
motivations, Castellanos notes that “los dos conceptos fundamentales en que [Ortiz] basó la investigación… (atavismo y fetichismo) fueron rechazados poco después por la ciencia antropológica contemporánea” [“the two fundamental concepts on which he [Ortiz] based the investigation… (atavism and fetishism) were renounced soon after by contemporary anthropological science”] (115). Atavism (that is, cultural behaviors considered by early twentieth-century science to be manifestations of pre-modern evolutionary states) is the clear rubric by which Ortiz implemented his reformist goals for modernizing Cuba. Such descriptions of AfroCubans as atavistic and fetishistic rendered them inferior to Cuba’s modern whites. They aligned with positivistic goals that, as Bronfman observes, “tended mostly to give new scientific life to old juridical and social hierarchies” (2). Pick clarifies that among scientific epistemologies of the era, “[t]he theory of atavism was not only a matter of fervent belief, but also part of a broader conception of politics and society” (121). Ortiz’s choice of such an analytical mode was therefore not unique. Criminology was already viable as a vehicle of progress and reform and, as such, was inextricably tied to notions of nation.

Finally, Ortiz’s use of the hampa concept denotes more of a conceptual impasse when we sample the principal studies’ thematic drives. While Brujos clearly invokes the atavistic idea and complies with the hampa delineation, Esclavos and Curros do not, or at least not as strictly. It would seem as though such classification does not readily apply to either its later installments or to Ortiz’s developing ideology. Indeed, in our estimation, it seems to be a largely inaccurate grouping. Could this lack of thematic coherence point to more “mysteries” surrounding Hampa afro-cubana? These questions aside, it seems clear that any definitional approach to Hampa

25 Correspondingly, if Ortiz’s conclusions about the freed slaves (Los negros horros) and the secret rituals of the priests (Los negros ñañigos) departed substantially from the hampa
afro-cubana must be unrestricting and, as such, coherent analyses of momentary ideological prerogative and scientific practice ought to begin with approaches to individual texts.

Although set forth as a national project for curing Cuba’s ‘African problem,’ Ortiz’s first book project, Los negros brujos (1906), inculcated revolutionary change in nineteenth-century criminology by allotting imbrications with a newly studied race and its ritual practices. Treating a phenomenon that Bronfman dubs as one of the “inherent but inexplicable features of a recently inaugurated inclusionary republic” (44), Ortiz put forth a study entirely dedicated to Afrocuban “witchery” and launched contemporary Afrocuban Studies, and thereby changing the scientific paradigm indefinitely and redefining the Republican nation in the process.

**Los negros brujos (1906)**

Though much of Ortiz’s works are the authoritative standards of the Afrocuban anthropological repertoire, the problematic portrayal of Afrocubans in his inaugural text thwarts such repute. Rife with errors, conceptual overgeneralization, racist approximation, and political motives, *Los negros brujos: apuntes para un estudio de etnología criminal* [*The Black Witches: Notes for a Study of Criminal Ethnology*] (1906), as the title suggests, privileges ideology over scientific accuracy and is now considered largely invalid. But although inexact in compilation guideline, it could be that he recognized the imprecision of his original title and left them for later, never-completed, projects.

26 To this effect, Castellanos’s description of *Brujos* is worth citing at length. “En realidad pasaron muchos años antes de que fuera separado. Y, sin embargo, sus limitaciones no son menos ostensibles. Allí no hay distinción entre los distintos cultos (o reglas) que componen el acervo religioso afrocubano. Se apunta que conviven en Cuba africanos de variadas procedencias y culturas distintas. Pero no se percibe que a cada una de las tres principales (yoruba, conga, carabalí) corresponde un complejo religioso distinto (Regla de Ocha o Santería, Palomonte Mayombe, y Sociedad Secreta Abakuá). Ortiz las mezcla todas, metiéndolas en un solo saco, creando un culto que declara ‘predominante,’ al que llama brujería. Y después se confunde, aludiendo a otros cultos… todo un mare mágnum.” [“In truth many years passed...”]
and racist in representation, the text is nevertheless pivotally important as a pioneer in its field. While its nineteenth-century precursors – works by historians, geographers, and linguists such as José Antonio Saco, Domingo Delmonte, Henri Dumont, José María de la Torre, and Esteban Pichardo – were thematically oriented towards Afrocuban history, such works were either incomplete or dealt with Afrocubans as slaves within colonial infrastructure, not as emancipated citizens of a Republic. Thus, in Castellanos’s estimation, Brujos merits the classification of pionero: “A Los negros brujos nadie puede discutirle su mérito de pionero. Por primera vez se hace una investigación metódica de las ofrendas, de los sacrificios, los ‘amarres,’ los hechizos, las prácticas mágicas, los sistemas adivinatorios y muchos otros aspectos de la religión afrocubana” [“No one can deny Brujos its merit as a pioneer. For the first time, investigations are made into the offerings, sacrifices, amarres, spells, magical practices, fortunetelling, and many other aspects of Afrocuban religion”] (112).

The text draws from the disciplinary inspiration of Verona-born criminologist Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909). Harrowitz notes Lombroso’s authority across multiple disciplines: “[d]uring his lifetime and for at least thirty years after his death Lombroso’s theories were taken seriously by scientists and the general public alike” (16). The years in question overlap with Brujos and Ortiz’s criminological/anthropological examinations of Afrocubá, which Lombroso’s clout certainly reached. The work of criminology’s father was also inevitably attached to notions of nation and was hardly disengaged from hegemonic polity. As Pick contends, “Lombroso’s before it was surpassed. And, however, its limitations are not less ostensible. In the text there is no distinction between the different cults (or reglas) that make up the heap of Afrocuban religions. It is noted that in Cuba Africans of various heritages and distinct cultures coexist. But it is not made evident that each of the three principle religious cultures (yoruba, conga, carabalí) corresponds with a distinct religious complex (Regla de Ocha or Santería, Palomonte Mayombe, and the Secret Society of Abakuá). Ortiz mixes them all up, throwing them all in the same bag, creating a cult that he declares as ‘predominant,’ which he calls witchcraft. From that point on he gets confused, alluding to other cults… a plethora of them]” (113-114).
work insisted that science was not a symptom of degeneration, but a means of regeneration. If he denied the validity of grand metaphysical ideas, he was nonetheless profoundly idealistic in his ideal to serve the nation through the scrupulous impartiality of his social theory” (116). Lombroso’s work certainly corresponds with Ortiz’s in its privilege of science on behalf of reform. For both thinkers, science was a means to national revision and hegemonic refinement of ‘criminal’ peoples. In her exceptional study, Bronfman notes Ortiz’s manipulations of such practice to the Cuban state of affairs: “Although Lombroso and his hereditary, morphological criminal anthropology is the proclaimed godfather of the book, Ortiz filled his chapters, not with the expected physiognomic descriptions and comparisons but with detailed descriptions of the brujos’ belief system” (59). Ortiz’s documentary rigor, while officially executed under the criminological spirit, departs from its most rudimentary methodology – physiognomy and morphology. Bronfman critic appraises the text along these lines:

[T]he book’s significance, beyond the argument, lies in its novelty of form and genre. In between Europe and Cuba, criminology and ethnology, textual and empirical bases for knowledge, Negros Brujos was a new kind of book for Cuban readers, turning a sensational series of events into the raw materials of a learned, original and (in the author’s eyes) redemptive social analysis that placed Cuba on the map of modern nations plagued by similar ills. At the same time it launched Ortiz’s significant career as a translator of people, practices, ideas, and texts. (57)

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27 Contextualizing Lombrosian Positivism within its Italian backdrop, the critic emphasizes that for “the intellectuals and politicians of the post-unification period in Italy, there remained a running contradiction between the achievement of nationhood, and the social realities of division and fragmentation, the myriad cultures and sub-cultures, separate languages, customs, economies, worlds in which Italy was constituted and threatened” (Pick 115).
Such insight speaks to the pioneering status of the text, however inept it is for modern criminology and however much of a departure it is from Lombrosian criminology. The “redemptive social analysis” allocates not only Cuba’s status as “modern,” but also recognizes Ortiz’s ampler intention: with the aim of ridding Cuba of its witchery, he examines the social malady from the crucial scientific position of modernity. As the critic alludes, Ortiz’s scientific approach to the criminal underworld is “original,” and this innovation speaks mutually to Cuba’s modernity and to Afrocuba’s scientific study.

*Brujos* must be contextualized within Ortiz’s political trajectory at the century’s beginning. The text is the locus in which his European criminological training abroad intermingled with his juridical work in Cuba, each important ingredients in his budding career as a young politician. Although recently transplanted in Cuba from Spain (recall Santí’s coinage of the *doble mirada* as cited in our introduction), Ortiz played an integral role in early republican politics. As Santí notes, “Ortiz pertenece… a una generación liberal republicana… que se plantea una gran misión: crear los fundamentos de la nación. Misión múltiple, desde luego: política, económica, cultural, social, pedagógica” [“Ortiz pertains to a liberal republican generation that plants a great mission: to create the foundations of the nation. And a varied mission it is: political, economical, cultural, social, and pedagogical”] (26). This involvement must be seen as fundamental contact with the hegemonic stratum – the culturally empowered elite that sought to mend their nation and bring progress by scientifically delimiting Cuba.\(^\text{28}\) The solidification of republican authority by racial hallmarks equates to an oppositional scheme of cultural dominance that allocates power in black and white terms. As the new government of

\(^{28}\) Returning to the farewell speech cited at the beginning of this chapter, it is important to realize that the *Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País* was itself a group that funneled Cuba’s most elite whites into the political ambit.
mainly white politicians construed the dynamic of power, blacks were inferior to whites, and national polity proliferated divisiveness.\textsuperscript{29} In Moore’s words,

Many demographic and social factors also affect the way dominant groups perceive the subaltern – for instance, the century-old associations in postslave societies between blacks and poverty, lack of education, crime, and violence – but this does not detract from the importance of culture as a site in which racial bigotry is justified and maintained. In many cases, the extent to which minority groups are accepted by the society they live in depends upon the degree to which they are able or willing to distance themselves from their unique cultural heritage.

(10)

\textit{Brujos} is perhaps most quintessential manifestation of such oppositionally racial configurations, for it textually justifies the dichotomy propagated by Republican cultural transmission. Inherent to the project was the objectification of Afrocuban cultural practice as inferior and scientifically unhelpful to Cuba’s progress towards a modern republic.\textsuperscript{30} Consequently, in the time-period in question, “Ortiz’s writings demonstrated a disdain for African-influenced expression,” and the

\textsuperscript{29} This climate must be seen as the predecessor to the Race War of 1912. Fermoselle’s review of the pre-Race War political climate reveals rapid growth of sentiment among blacks, particularly Afrocuban veterans who failed to receive compensation for their pivotal role in Cuban independence from Spain (82-130). Likewise, Helg’s delineations of “frustration” (117) and “mobilization” (141) concisely address the progressive movements toward military conflict. Not only must this climate be seen as a lead in to the race war, but \textit{Brujos} could also be considered as a possible fomenter of the war.

\textsuperscript{30} As Moore makes clear, “two interpenetrating discourses about race permeated Cuban literature in the early 1900s. The first consisted of intellectuals who conceived of racial evolution in Darwinian terms, suggesting that blacks and other non-Caucasians were mentally and physically inferior to whites because they had not yet ‘evolved’ to the same extent as Western Europeans…. A second discursive position that became more prominent in Cuba from the late 1910s based racial pronouncements on psychological or cultural criteria. It suggested that in physical terms blacks and members of other races were the potential equals of Caucasians, but their traditions and modes of behavior were heavily influenced by an earlier ‘stage’ of cultural development” (32).
undergirding ideologies of political hegemony instilled contempt for Afrocubans among white circles (34). Such criminological posture allotted Cuba’s African subjects the classification of *delincuentes* [delinquents]. By associating Afrocubans with delinquency, white Cuban nationalists excluded blacks from the *polis* and projected a unified vision of what national (white) culture should be. Afrocubans, as such, needed to overcome pathological inferiority to contribute to national culture in ways becoming of white Cuban citizens.³¹ To that end, Matos Arévalo summarizes that in Cuba, “no existían antecedentes de estudios sobre la delincuencia negra, a no ser los informes de la política referidos a los robos y asesinatos” [“there existed no prior studies concerning black delinquency, aside from those political pamphlets dealing with robberies and murders”] (22). Hence, *Brujos* fits the “pioneer” label in two ways. It was not only the first major text to document post-slavery Afrocuban ritual. It was also the first study that did so from an overt perspective of delinquency for a nationalist Republican end, thereby amalgamating science and polity. Palmié echoes the nation-building implications of *Brujos’* atavistic premise in its political context:

Such reasoning not only allowed for the representation of African-derived cultural forms as physiologically determined racial atavisms. It also rendered them accessible to a discourse on social hygiene that sought to objectify African witchcraft as a transracially contagious social pathogen – something that needed to be, and could be, contained or eliminated only by scientific measures. (30-31)³²

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³¹ “African-derived religion became a target of officials who pronounced it a ‘social pathology’ brought by slaves to the Americas, a manifestation of the psychological inferiority of blacks” (Moore 31).

³² Castellanos says the following of the atavism employed in *Brujos*: “Su tesis atávica gana… una inesperada elasticidad ideológica. En el libro inicial de Ortiz el negro cubano no está preso en un molde genético o biológico insuperable. Pertenece ciertamente a una etapa primitiva, elemental, inferior del proceso social, pero de la cual le era posible salir despojándose de su
As a result, the erroneous documentary classifications of post-slavery Afrocuban culture(s) put forth by Ortiz were subsumed by political causes as justifications for cultural whitening. To be sure, “soon after its original publication in 1906 [Brujos] had acquired canonical status within the republican antibrujería campaigns” and served notions of the non-African Cuban nation (232).  

The wealth of additional critical material addressing Brujos and its racial nation-building schematics makes further discussion unnecessary here. However, in tracing the discursive formation of the Afrocuban nation, it is useful to contemplate further the role that science plays in the nation-building process; and more specifically, the evolving scientific paradigms with which Ortiz approaches this and later works. Viñalet notes that, despite the text’s ostensibly scientific standards, its reception was far from positive past political circles: “A pesar del tratamiento puramente científico del tema, la recepción casi unánime para Los negros brujos

atávico modo de vida, es decir, renunciando íntegramente a todos los aspectos de su cultura atrasada, bárbara, repugnante e inmoral. Aquí Ortiz parece ofrecer una puerta de escape, pues no ve al negro condenado ineluctablemente a la condición de inferioridad que tantos le atribuían. Sin embargo, es obvio que su etnocentrismo sigue vigente al recomendar la eliminación de los elementos culturales afrocubanos para poder ser aceptados dentro de la cubanidad” [“His atavistic thesis brings about an unexpected ideological elasticity. In Ortiz’s initial book the Black Cuban is not trapped in an insuperable genetic or biological mold. He/she certainly pertains to a primitive, elemental, stage of inferior social process, but from which he/she could leave shedding his/her atavistic way of life, that is to say, integrally renouncing each and every aspect of his/her lagging, barbaric, repugnant, and immoral culture. Here Ortiz seems to offer an escape hatch in that he does not see blacks as unvaryingly condemned to the inferior condition that so many attributed them. However, it is obvious that his ethnocentrism goes on to recommend the elimination of Afrocuban cultural elements so that Afrocubans may be accepted within ideas of Cubanness”] (118).

33 “The concept of brujería acquired its tremendous power as a device for constructing overtly racialized notions of Cuban national selfhood precisely at a moment when Cuban versions of European science came into their own. The conjuncture was not fortuitous. The vision of social progress and scientific control of human affairs that animated Cuban intellectual life in the early republican period was deeply imbricated in the construct of an atavistic other whose very body – indeed, its anatomy and viscereal structure – would serve as the theater within which apprentices of an international sorcery such as the young Ortiz would perform their cures of the Cuban national organism” (Palmié 225).
osciló entre la benevolencia, el desdén, el silencio y la hostilidad, tanto por blancos como por negros y mulatos” [“Even with the purely scientific treatment of the theme, the almost unanimous reception of *Brujos* oscillated between benevolence, disdain, silence, and hostility among whites, blacks, and mulattoes alike”] (86). Bronfman posits that the feedback was in fact more varied: “While points of critique varied, most authors insisted that their criticisms should not detract from the importance of the contribution that Ortiz had made” (62). Whichever the case, such opinion from all echelons of Cuba’s racial spectrum indicates that Ortiz’s attempt at whitening the national imaginary was short-lived. In fact, within just a few years, many Cuban thinkers – Ortiz included – would begin to make honest efforts at intercalating Afrocuban imagery into national symbolism. It is thus significant that while writing *Brujos*, Ortiz continually encountered new modes of scientific inquiry that affected the ideological trajectory of later *Hampa afro-cubana* texts (88). Matos Arévalo points to the process of societal “dissection” undertaken by *Brujos* and its scientific principle: “En la medida en que se avanza en el estudio de *Los negros brujos*, va descubriéndose a un hombre de ciencia inmerso en la disección de la sociedad cubana; y emergen de allí juicios que ayudan a entender el pensamiento del científico. Tal ocurre cuando se detiene a observar a los brujos, la difusión de la brujería y el porvenir de ésta” [“In the manner that *Brujos* advances, we discover a man of science immersed in the dissection of Cuban society; and from there emerge verdicts that guide the understanding of scientific thought. This happens when one stops to observe the witches, the diffusion of witchcraft, and its future”] (93). It becomes clear that while Ortiz intended to use *Brujos* for bettering the nation by extinguishing witchcraft, it also served as a venue for improving his own scientific method. This recognition of the scientific motive as comparable to the national one suggests a new reading of *Brujos*. However difficult it is to ignore the text’s racially-charged
rhetoric, if one considers Ortiz’s treatise within the totality of his life-long scientific enterprise, the textual commentary on science plausibly equates to a revolutionized scientific paradigm. The text, by extension, necessarily embodies Ortiz’s initial plunge into Afrocuban ethnography and serves as a foundational document of that field. *Brujos* is just as much about the Cuban nation as it is about scientific practice, and, until recently, the critical body has tended to de-emphasize the implications of such scientific innovation by focusing on the text’s problematics. “Ortiz situated himself above politics,” Bronfman notes, “in search of scientific truth rather than of moral judgement [sic]” (52).

In the first chapter, Ortiz discusses his study in scientific terms and notes, in particular, that his work “completes” criminology, a research field based, in his estimation, “almost exclusively on observations of the white delinquent”:34

> En conclusión, el estudio de la mala vida cubana, es de especial interés porque á medida que se profundice y extiendan las investigaciones en ese sentido, preferentemente con relación á la raza negra, han de aportarse originales y preciosos datos á la etnografía criminal, ciencia que aun está en estado de formación y que ha de venir á completar la antropología y sociología criminales contemporáneas, basadas casi exclusivamente todavía sobre la observación del hombre delincuente blanco. (1906: 19)

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34 This is an interesting statement. In *Los negros esclavos* (1916), Ortiz indicates that his method – the fusion of historical fact and contemporary scientific analysis – completes and corrects those postulated in *Brujos*. As such, the refinement of ideological frame and research practice must be considered a staple of Ortiz’s scholarship, a notion that upholds Pérez Firmat’s thesis about the ‘ever-corrective’ Ortiz.
[In conclusion, the study of Cuban crime is of particular interest because as long as investigations become deeper and more extensive, preferably with relation to the black race, they will contribute original and precious facts to criminal ethnology, a science that is still in a formative state and that will come to complete contemporary criminal anthropology and sociology, still based almost exclusively on observations of the white delinquent]. (1906: 19)\(^35\)

The passage highlights the formation of a scientific discipline rather than a racially-motivated call for national whitening. Ortiz’s admission that his science is still “in a formative state” clarifies his research practice.\(^36\) If the criminological science that addresses Afrocubans has yet to solidify as a discipline, Ortiz’s treatment of it cannot come under such harsh scrutiny. His deliberation allots the treatise an ideological fluidity that, on some level, could make its racism less effacing. Moreover, the self-reflection reveals that he believes he is doing the discipline a service by incorporating the black subject into a typically white discourse. Even though the text’s ideological motivation hegemonically condemns the scientific data he collects on Afrocuba’s subaltern in terms of national progress, it privileges sound science in the Republic. Ironically, Ortiz’s later ambition will embrace a similar penchant for revisionary scientific methodology while erasing the ideological one that under-girds Brujos.

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\(^35\) Curious here is Ortiz’s contention that Lombroso’s study largely ignored issues of race. Pick indicates that, as early as 1862, Lombroso “conducted anthropometrical researches on three thousand soldiers in order to investigate the ethnic diversity of the Italian people” (114). Moreover, the demarcation between “northern” and “southern” Italians was most definitely conceived in racial terms, and Lombroso openly participated in the post-unification Italian debate. “Northern Italians sometimes said that Calabria evoked Africa. Indeed the ‘Dark Continent’ was said to begin respectively at Bologna, Florence, Rome, or Naples, depending on the birth place of the speaker. The south was cast as a form of other world, racially different, a space to be explored, penetrated, contained, colonised” (114). Not only does Lombroso’s investigation take assume racialized positions, but it clearly involves African delineations in such postures.

\(^36\) Once again, this notion is readily applicable to later portions of Ortiz’s work.
Immediately following his introductory chapter, Ortiz infuses his Positivist writing with myriad data. The remaining pages are replete with charts, tables, glossaries, and pictures that present what is, comparatively speaking, an exhaustive archive on Afrocuban cultural practice. In light of the anthropologist’s later work, Brujos is incomplete and abbreviated. Initially, however, it was authoritative in its sheer novelty. Being that the reasoning behind the inclusion of such information has already been made clear, we will focus our argument solely on the scientific practices outlined in these chapters. It is often difficult to overlook the text’s slanderous rhetoric; even more so when one considers Ortiz’s later advocacy for Afrocubanness. The chapters are, however, quite revealing in their scientific self-referentiality, a trend we find over the course of Ortiz’s life work.  

Perhaps the text’s most overarching scientific premise is one that Ortiz admits to on more than one occasion: there is very little actual data to document his study.

En la imposibilidad de dar datos concretos y sistemáticos que determinen con precisión la intensidad y extensión que en la actualidad tiene la brujería afro-cubana, porque no existen fuentes de estudio a donde acudir, inserto en este capítulo buena parte de las noticias más características que referente a la brujería ha publicado la Prensa cubana en estos últimos años o que me han sido comunicadas por personas dignas de todo crédito. (1906: 343, my emphasis)

[Being that it is impossible to give concrete and systematic facts that determine with precision the intensity and extension with which Afrocuban witchcraft exists

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37 As we will see in Chapter Three, this self-recognition of scientific practice is one of the underlying critical processes that steers the dissemination of folk heritage in Archivos del Folklore Cubano (1924-1930).
today, *as the sources do not exist*, I insert in this chapter the majority of the most characteristic pieces regarding witchcraft that the Cuban press has published in recent years, or that have been passed to me by persons deserving much credit].

(1906: 343, my emphasis)

This is an understandable bibliographical move. Without sufficient published material to guide his research, Ortiz takes the liberty of publishing it himself as an appendix to his own work. After admitting that much of the latter is the first of its kind, this chapter seems to be writing new science in order to back up even newer science. What follows are summaries of fifty-seven brujería episodes, dating from 1902 through 1905, for which Ortiz provides the source – most often the newspaper, date, and town of the incident involving the Afrocuban witch – and then brief commentary and/or cited dialogue about the incidents. This annotated bibliography reveals the high standard of documentary/archival foundation that Ortiz instills in this and later works, and casts the reader as an analytical compiler-of sorts. The connection between exhaustive documentation and new scientific authority complies fully with the idea of his work as labor that undoubtedly forges new “paths.” It is also important to consider that Ortiz’s inclusion of such material coincides with what Bronfman describes as the “sensational brujería scares that shook early Republican Cuba” (44). In crafting his political agenda, Ortiz certainly manipulated the popularity of these scandalous cases that occupied so much press and went on to reprint them.

The question of science is addressed most overtly in the book’s last chapter, which discusses “El Porvenir de la brujería” [“The future of witchcraft”]. In his approach to the Republic’s future he addresses the need for all Cubans to come to grips with witchery. “La ignorancia produce el miedo y de éste nacen… las supersticiones… que involucran un elemento negativo para el progreso social, tan negativo como el sentimiento de miedo que los inspira”
[“ignorance produces fear and from fear comes... superstitions... that involve a negative element fear social progress, as negative as the feeling of fear that inspires them”] (1906: 384).

Ignorance – that is, the lack of scientifically-sound knowledge – to brujería practice only perpetuates the national problem. Thus, the scientific catalog presented in Brujos is an enlightening tool that Cuban whites must make use of. Ortiz remarks later that while whites move “toward science,” black brujos are not inherently capable of such a maneuver. “Si los blancos han separado poco a poco de la religión a la ciencia, considerando aquélla solamente como norma ética de vida, los brujos no tienen otra ciencia que su fe religiosa, y su moral está muy lejos de someterse a reglamentos divinos” [“If whites have moved little by little from religion toward science, considering such science only as a normal ethic of life, the witches don’t have any other science than their religion, and their moral is very far from a submission to divine rules”] (1906: 384). Non-Afrocubans must make use of the science/reason within their reach.

By the same token, however, Afrocubans conceive science/reason from a spiritual perspective and cannot be expected to shed their unawareness by their own means. Central to this comparison is the assumption that Afrocubans are unable to embrace science without embracing white scientific modes. As Ortiz is suspect of the white craze of superstitions dealing with Afrocubans, he implores that whites must overcome such ignorance before any pathological cure is substantiated. Being that whites allegedly consider science as a “normal ethic of life,” it is their responsibility to refute ignorance and act “scientifically.” His atavistic approach to witchcraft thereby necessitates a change not only in Afrocuban thought, but in white thought as well.

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38 All of this harks back to Enlightenment philosophy, from which Positivism gets much of its inspiration. At the close of the text, the author solidifies his conception of enlightened science with imagery to that effect.
After restating his thesis\(^{39}\) Ortiz then projects the established dichotomy – science versus ignorance, modernity versus atavism – onto what could best be classified as disciplinary reflection. These revisions of the atavistic premise are at once readily associable and markedly distinct from Lombroso’s standpoint.

Pero el brujo *nato* no lo es por atavismo, en el sentido riguroso de esta palabra; es decir, como *un salto atrás* del individuo con relación al estado de progreso de la especie que forma el medio social al cual aquél debe adaptarse; más bien puede decirse que al ser transportado de África á Cuba, fue el medio social el que para él saltó improvisadamente hacia delante, dejándolo con sus compatriotas en las profundidades de su salvajismo, en los primeros escalones de la evolución de su psiquis. (1906: 397)

[But the born *brujo* is not like that because of atavism, in the strictest sense of that word, that is to say, an an individual’s *step backwards* with relation to the state of progress of the species that forms the social medium to which he/she should adapt. Perhaps it could be said that upon being transported from Africa to Cuba, the social medium was the agent that pushed him/her backwards, leaving them with their compatriots in the depths of their savagery, in the primary steps of the evolution of their psyche]. (1906: 397)

\(^{39}\) “El culto brujo es, en fin, socialmente negativo con relación al mejoramiento de nuestra sociedad, porque dada la primitividad que le es característica, totalmente amoral, contribuye a retener las conciencias de los negros incultos en los bajos fondos de la barbarie africana” [“The witch cult is, alter all, socially negative with respect to the bettering of our society, because given the completely immoral primitiveness that is innate to them, it contributes to the retention of the consciousnesses of the uncultured blacks in the low realms of African barbarism”] (391).
This is a major revision of Lombroso’s concept of atavism. No longer is the Afrocuban delinquent the inherent evolutionary predecessor of modern humankind. Rather, Ortiz concedes that the social conditions of “transport” and the “social medium” awaiting transplanted African slaves were the cause of their quandary. Indicating an adaptation of scientific practice to a specifically Afrocuban branch of inquiry, this break with its disciplinary source is a scientifically empowering move. As Ortiz manipulates this “path” of the “Cuban frond,” he sets a precedent for future research. Hence, Brujos, national aims aside, catalyzes an important disciplinary modification. It literally alters the scientific paradigm. The overall tone of the passage, however, keeps with Lombrosian criminology and offers scientific study of deviance as progressive.

Ortiz muses next about the need for science and, more specifically, the need for an exhaustive Positivist encyclopedism, catered uniquely to the study of Cuba’s African subjects.

“Se quiere atacar á la brujería y en general á la delincuencia sin estudiar al brujo y al delincuente, sin descubrir los factores que las determinan” [“People want to condemn witchcraft and, generally speaking, delinquency, without studying the witch and the delinquent, without discovering the factors that determine them”] (1906: 402). A barebones statement such as this

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40 First, the alteration introduces agency and deviates from the ‘born criminal’ notion, an idea frequented in Lombroso’s work. Second, it represents a clear link to the Republican project and the Cuban slave system and implies attempts to bring European disciplines to America, tweaking them for inherently Cuban issues.

41 It would be interesting to compare Sallila’s approach to the Spanish picaresque criminal with Ortiz’s modifications of Lombroso’s work.

42 Ortiz continues comparing Cuba’s scientific conquest of yellow fever. “Se quiso extirpar la fiebre amarilla sin estudiar al enfermo ni descubrir su factor morboso. Y escribo esta comparación porque nada mejor que la victoria total que en Cuba hemos alcanzado contra la fiebre amarilla, merced a la aplicación de enérgicos procedimientos médicos é higiénicos impuestos por la ciencia moderna, puede hacer vaticinar el éxito que se obtendría en la lucha contra la brujería, y en general contra las otras formas de la mala vida, si se siguieran los también enérgicos procedimientos represivos y preventivos exigidos así mismo por el progreso científico.
is a battle cry for science and implores white Cubans to study their African peers, an ironic outcome given the original demonizing purpose of the treatise.\textsuperscript{43} After adapting Lombroso’s atavism, Ortiz redirects his attention to the method by which white scholars have approached brujería. Positivism such as this encompasses the delinquent as well as its examiner.\textsuperscript{44}

Ortiz then allots his cry a pedagogic application. “Para obtener [la acción social contra la brujería] es indispensable la intensa difusión de la instrucción en todas las clases de la República; no de la instrucción superficial que se adquiere generalmente cuando niños, sino de la que abarque sólidas nociones científicas acerca de la causación real de los fenómenos naturales y hasta de los sociales” [“To obtain [social action against witchcraft] intense instructive diffusion is indispensable in all classes of the Republic; not a superficial instruction that is acquired generally at childhood, rather one that embarks upon solid scientific notions concerning real causality of natural, and even social, phenomena”] (1906: 420). Practically speaking, the scientist declares a national pedagogical goal and clarifies his earlier modifications in terms of contemporáneo [“People wanted to get rid of yellow fever by neither studying the sick nor discovering its deadly factor. And I write this comparison because we have reached nothing short of total victory against yellow fever in Cuba, thanks to the application of energetic medical and hygienic means imposed by modern science can foretell the success that would be attained against witchcraft, and in general against the other forms of low life, if the repressive and preventative energetic means demanded thus by the contemporary scientist”] (1906: 402). In reference to this passage, Bronfman aptly notes “a deep ambiguity” (61).

\textsuperscript{43} Note the particularly condemning rhetoric employed in this passage: “La campaña contra la brujería debe tener dos objetivos: uno inmediato, la destrucción de los focos infectivos; mediato el otro, la desinfección del ambiente, para impedir que se mantenga y se reproduzca el mal” [“The campaign against witchcraft should have two objectives: one, immediate, of the destruction of the infective foci; the other, the disinfection of the environment in order to see that evil is prevented and not reproduced”] (1906: 403).

\textsuperscript{44} It is interesting to note that this could perhaps be a premature visage of transculturación, as Ortiz is bent on considering both sides of the cultural equation and examining how a mutual influence could redraw both ends of the racial spectrum.
These practical instructions, directed toward non-Afrocubans, comply with the notion of a scientifically-founded national culture. As Bronfman makes clear, the solution to the atavistic “throwbacks” that stained the early twentieth-century Cuban racial climate “lay in education and social sanitation” (48). In stating such instructions, Ortiz attempts to remedy the Afrocuban cultural phenomenon via modifications of national pedagogy. He follows this thread with a meditation once again redolent of an Enlightenment epistemology: “Sobre todo, luz, mucha luz; que las supersticiones no anidan sino en las sombras. Difundamos la instrucción, vulgaricemos las verdades científicas” [“Above all, light, much light, so that superstions don’t even take hold in the shadows. Let us diffuse instruction and make scientific truths common to all”] (1906: 428). Ortiz literally recognized his scholarship as a device of social illumination, an ideal that corresponds with the eighteenth-century enlightenment enterprise. Bronfman notes that “Ortiz’s success at collecting ideas and materials from different parts of the world in order to shed light on a uniquely Cuban problem preceded, and probably provided the impetus for, a burst of intellectual activity focussed [sic] on a number of issues. These issues might be gathered loosely under the rubric of ‘progress and reform.’” (65). Ortiz’s rhetoric here is consequently doubly useful in that it is directed toward both the intellectual elite and the Cuban populace at large. His discourse seeks a panoramic (white) audience, and desires “progress and reform” at all social levels.

45 “La instrucción sin embargo, no destruirá la brujería en pocas generaciones, pero al menos, contribuirá á su desafricanización y por lo tanto á la desaparición de las formas más graves de la delictuosidad bruja y de los brujos africanos, que al irse civilizando se harán adaptables, resultando menos intolerable su parasitismo, análogamente á las actuales adivinas blancas” [“Instruction, however, will not destroy witchcraft in a few generations, but at least it will contribute to its de-Africanization and thus to the disappearance of the most serious forms of witchery and of the African witches, whom while civilizing themselves will be made adaptable, their parasitism becoming less intolerable, analogous to the current white…”] (1906: 422).
In 1910 Ortiz contended that Cuban nationalism must turn away from racial premises and address ideals of Republican progress in terms of civilizations. In “Civilizaciones; no razas” [“Civilizations, Not Races”], he departed from the rhetorical scope of *Brujos* in what could be the initial revisions of his previously atavistic frame. “No se extrañe, pues, que hoy el principio antropológico de raza, aun siendo socialmente ilusión... sea un vigorizante y sustituto ideológico del imperialismo.” [“It is not surprising that today the anthropological principle of race, even as social illusion... is an invigorating substitute ideology for imperialism] (95). Such comments foreshadow Ortiz’s ideological revisions. Notably, his take on race in *Brujos* is not one of “social illusion.” Rather, he postulates that the maladies of Cuba’s African races are the concrete realities preventing the nation from realizing its modern capabilities. Now, just four years after publishing *Brujos*, Ortiz redraws his conceptualization of race, although still for an overtly political motive (imperialism). Furthermore, a close read reveals a critical approximation to previously embodied racial ideologies. Ortiz now openly acknowledges how racial constructs can be employed for affairs of state; how science can aid polity. While in no way reminiscent of the spiritual stance on the “Cuban race” as examined in Chapter Four, these comments indicate Ortiz’s morphing dogma toward national race issues.

The preceding passage and a quick examination of Ortiz’s bibliography reveal that the type of political and criminological ideologies in *Brujos* was in fact short-lived; in fact, it was already non-static by 1910. Within the same decade Ortiz went on to publish the ‘trilogy’s’ second volume, *Los negros esclavos* [*The Black Slaves*] (1916), in which he took the initial steps in correcting his ideological standpoint much as he would in “Civilizaciones; no razas.” If over the course of Ortiz’s career one observes a documentary zeal that initiates numerous studies and students of Afrocuban culture, all of which will in turn lead to the grounding of Afrocuban
symbolism within the national imaginary, the origins of all remaining fervor recall science’s treatment in *Los Negros Brujos*.

**Los negros esclavos** (1916)

What *Brujos* lacks in scientific accuracy *Los negros esclavos* (1916) makes up for in its greater documentary rigor. The text encompasses a lengthy history of Cuban slavery, including an in-depth examination of the slave’s journey from Africa, social classifications, statistics, and a host of conclusions drawn from hefty pieces of demographic data. Though largely descriptive, Ortiz offers here much rumination on social, legal, political, and economic mechanisms intrinsic to slave machinery. Such reflections take in chapter-length side notes on topics such as resistance movements, examinations of the slave trade and transport, legal issues, juridical definitions of slavery, linguistic differentiations, and distinguished urban and plantation slave experiences.

The historical nature of *Esclavos* cannot be emphasized enough, and some preliminary considerations to that effect are needed. Unlike *Brujos*, the text neither considers present social malice nor proposes to eradicate Cuban culture of African religious practices. In *Esclavos*, Ortiz roots Afrocuban Studies in a synthesized overview of Afrocuban history and tackles the historical precedents underriding contemporary Afrocuban issues. It is important to recognize, though, that Ortiz does implement such historical analysis while having in mind contemporary reflection. The historical detail in the presentation of the Afrocuban slave experience is capitulated in *Esclavos* for purposes of contextualizing Republican Afrocuban culture and relating it to cultural, historical antecedents. Perhaps recapitulated would be more accurate, as the historical lineage of *Esclavos* is understood all the more when one considers its vital
interplay with the work of José Antonio Saco (1797-1879). Saco’s volumes – *Historia de la esclavitud de la raza Africana en el Nuevo Mundo y en especial en los países américo-hispanos* [*History of the Slavery of the African Race in the New World and especially in Hispanic-American Countries*] (1879) – are integral to *Esclavos*’ composition. Indeed, in Ortiz’s mind, they are “irreplaceable.”  

Although Saco’s four-volume study is cited throughout *Esclavos*, the motivations guiding the two authors are remarkably distinct. Saco’s analysis, written during slavery, sought to revise the slave system for a precise ulterior objective: Cuban independence from Spain. Inherent to his plan was a harsh approach to Cuba’s Africans, whose preponderance Saco deemed discouraging to the movement. To his mind, the social solution lay in removing the African populace by eradicating slavery. In this way, Saco was only critical of slavery in as much as it was the system preventing an expedient white political rule; his position was undeniably racist, elitist, and certainly non-appreciative of Afrocuban cultural influence.

Conceived after both slavery and independence, Ortiz’s work boasted no such aim, though Ortiz and Saco are not entirely oppositional in their theses. *Los negros esclavos* intended to intercalate historical examination into the growingly polemical scientific study of Afrocubans. As we will see in the prefaces to *Esclavos*, Ortiz’s standpoint was still somewhat pointed toward *hampa* criminality, in that he still considered Afrocubanness woeful to modernity. Thus *Esclavos*, while historical, is still directed toward social ills packaged within Cuba’s African ‘problem.’ Like Saco’s *Historia*, then, *Esclavos* also addressed Afrocuban culture through a degrading lens. Ortiz posits historical analyses to explain the causes of present Afrocuban social issues. Such historical approximation toward the Afrocuban slavery system contextualized the phenomenon,

46 Ortiz states: “los insustituibles libros de nuestro Saco” [“the irreplaceable works of our Saco”] (1996: 70).
and such efforts at contextualization disclosed the harsh reality of that process.\textsuperscript{47} In this way, *Esclavos* achieved a conciliatory tone that, on some levels, ‘pardons’ contemporary Afrocubans for their historical blight. Ortiz’s scientific method intercalates a rigorous historical completeness that intends to demystify contemporary Afrocuban culture; again, the broad research appendices serve this end.

Situated between *Brujos* and *Esclavos* was a landmark Afrocuban conflict that backdrops all treatises on race of the time. Understandably, the Cuban 1912 Race War dispatched racial conflict to the forefront of society and politics; Cubans associated the looming spectre of racial dissent with the conflict’s bloody course of events. Concerning the racial and social melees plaguing the nation before and during the crisis, Helg points out that “the misrepresentation of the protest as a race war allowed for indiscriminate racist stereotyping” (195). Correspondingly, de la Fuente observes that the conflict dealt a blow to conciliations of “racial diversity with white fears” (27). To be sure, such divisiveness – that is, the national propagation of the conflict as a racialized, ethnically-driven matter – quashed exertion towards unified nationalist progress, modernity, and reform. The dampening effect of the *Guerrita del Doce* – the “little war” as it was called so as to minimize its national importance – on Republican social reform can further explain the somewhat sympathetic representation of slave experience. It is obvious how that conflict, which by some reports resulted in the murder of hundreds of thousands of blacks, might usher in a need for historical understanding of Afrocuban sentiment, a notion that makes Ortiz’s historicity all the more pressing.\textsuperscript{48} *Esclavos*, then, historicizes the compendium of attitudes surrounding Cuba’s racial discord and its contextualizing force; indeed, on many levels, it seeks

\textsuperscript{47} This criminological enterprise, though, is overridden by his sympathetic treatment of Cuban slavery, as we will see shortly.

\textsuperscript{48} Fermoselle notes that by some accounts, “thousands” of Blacks were killed in the conflict (146).
to eradicate future *guerritas* while basing Afrocuba upon a more solid, historically based, position.

Two eminent underpinnings offer a nexus between *Los negros esclavos* and *Los negros brujos*. First, *Esclavos* contains a great deal of disciplinary reflection, albeit less overt than *Brujos*. Ortiz effectuates disciplinary expansion by considering the conceptual bases of slavery outside Cuba. As studies on social delinquency were transplanted onto the “Cuban frond” in *Brujos*, so in *Esclavos* Ortiz addressed slavery as a construct not contingent upon problems of Cuban race. *Brujos*, however, involved the application of a foreign (Italian/Spanish) discipline to an enclosed Cuban scenario, that is, one that did not specifically address extraneous Cuban matters. Alternatively, *Esclavos* posits an exhaustively particular Cuban thematic, and so contextualizes that theme among non-Cuban considerations of slavery. The latter is more complete on both fronts: its commentary on Afrocuban slavery is exhaustive indeed, while its comparative context further opens disciplinary range. Second, a survey of both chapter titles and rhetorical usage reveals the extent to which Ortiz’s approach to Afrocuban studies has become less atavistically motivated and now boasts a language that reveals greater sympathy towards the Afrocuban experience. While portions reminisce an atavistic lens, many passages designate rhetorical adaptations that coincide with a burgeoning ideological shift. This moves the study towards to a celebration of Afrocuban culture, albeit preliminary. Accordingly, *Esclavos* must be read as a corrective text.49

Central to Ortiz’s case is his introduction to *Los negros esclavos*, written within the same disciplinary frame in which he wrote *Brujos*. The initial chapters – “Introducción al estudio de la mala vida cubana” [“Introduction to the Study of Cuban Low Life”], “Los negros afrocubanos”

49 The original (1916) cover also evokes sympathy. The image contrasts a fallen slave being beaten by a white man, whip in the air and sword at his side.
[“The Black Afrocubans”], “La psicología de los afrocubanos” [“The Psychology of Afrocubans”]—adhere, almost verbatim, to the introductory prose in Brujos and reveal that the atavistic premise examining Cuban delinquency critically has been carried over. The difference is historical background. After establishing the study as topically geared toward “Cuban Low Life,” Ortiz digresses to a three-chapter historical synthesis of Afrocuban slavery, “Historia de la esclavitud afrocubana” [“History of Afrocuban Slavery”]. He begins the historical section (Chapters IV-VI) with reasoning that upholds these premises, and he articulates a mode of inquiry that requires a genuine understanding derived from historical application. Still with atavistic remnants, Ortiz now clamors for the need for in-depth understanding of Afrocuban slavery as a way to escape current social conditions: he provides historical details, treats the entire historical trajectory of Afrocuban slavery, and intercalates various juridical excerpts for documentation’s sake. These appendices span from 1527 to 1880 and evidence the massive nature of Ortiz’s bibliographical ambition. As in his first text, he sustains his own bibliography by including his own sources in full, and again points to the “enlightened” sense of his mission.

Para hacer el estudio de la influencia que el factor negro ejerció y ejerce en cualquier aspecto de la sociedad cubana, es preciso remontar la observación a tiempos pasados y a ambientes sociales que fueron, principalmente, a los dos primeros tercios del siglo último…. [H]ay que estudiar al negro, para comprender en todo su significado vigoroso los caracteres de su originalidad africana y poder apreciar cómo éstos han sellado después, indeleblemente, la vida de nuestras bajas

50 These chapters are removed from Brujos and put in Esclavos as part of Ortiz’s (for the most part unrealized) editorial revisions. See the next section for specifics.
51 Recall the fluidity of the Hampa grouping discussed previously. A historical venture such as this does not necessarily fall into a “low life” or “underworld” categorization, especially given the sympathy evoked for the slaves in the author’s commentary.
capas sociales…. [I]mporta estudiar la esclavitud afrocubana, partiendo de la trata esclavista, que arrancaba a los negros infelices de su tierra nativa, hasta las adaptaciones sociales de esos negros ya libres al ambiente de Cuba. (1996: 46)

[In order to study the influence that the black factor exercised and exercises on any aspect of Cuban society it is necessary to turn to past times and environments principally the first two-thirds of the last century…. [I]t is important to study the black in order to understand, in all of its vigorous sense, the characters of its African originality and to be able to appreciate how these have later undoubtedly sealed the live of our lower social strata… [I]t is important to study Afrocuban slavery, starting with the slave trade that rooted out the unhappy blacks from their native land and ending with the social adaptations of those blacks now free in the Cuban environment]. (1996: 46)

The scientific paradigm is now documented with historical meditations that make the text self-sustaining and more complete from a disciplinary standpoint. In this way, historicity distances Esclavos from the essential atavism of its prequel. In Castellanos’s view, “Al suspender, en gran parte del tratado, la prejuiciosa orientación penológica que lastra su inicio, y sustituirla por un enfoque histórico, el resultado final es mucho más aceptable y fructífero. Por eso, mientras Los negros brujos es un libro totalmente obsoleto, Los negros esclavos... todavía puede leerse con provecho casi un siglo después de escrito.” (“Upon suspending, in large part, the prejudicial criminological orientation that marks its beginning, and substituting it for a historical focus, the final result is much more acceptable and beneficial. For this reason, while Brujos is a completely

52 Of The Black Slaves Castellanos states that Ortiz “makes great advance in the classification of Afrocuban cultures,” and as such corrects his curtailed analysis in Brujos (122).
obese book, *Esclavos*… can still be insightful almost an entire century after its publication]” (124). This context notwithstanding, our reading of the scientific trajectory of Ortiz’s early work does not render his 1906 text “obsolete.” Castellanos’s comments do clarify, however, precisely what the historical approach to the study of Afrocuban slavery achieves for the discipline. The contextual drive all but completes, corrects, and authorizes critical discourse on Afrocubans. Whereas the 1906 presentation of Afrocubans lacks historical context, in *Esclavos* Ortiz divulges the historical mechanisms heralding the then-current social panorama. It is along these lines that Matos Arévalo remarks how Ortiz’s documentation in *Esclavos* undergirds the work’s historical drive. “La presencia de una actitud consciente en la obra de Ortiz ante lo histórico, no ya como narración o descripción, sino como fuerza cultural necesaria que condiciona cualquier empeño modifier de la sociedad cubana, pasa a ser un elemento fundamental de su reflexión” [“The presence of a conscious historical attitude in Ortiz’s work, no longer as narration or description, but rather as a necessary cultural force that conditions whatever modifying attempt on the part of Cuban society, becomes a fundamental element of his reflection”] (35). Such is Ortiz’s insertion of historical completeness into the realm of his published research.53 More importantly, historicity projects Ortiz onto the type of social analyses that comprise his later work in the discipline.

[I]nicia Ortiz el cambio hacia lo estrictamente social; con el abandono paulatino de las concepciones biologizantes, comienza a definirse como promotor y creador de los estudios sociales y culturales, y sin duda lo que va quedando de su

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53 One need not look further than Ortiz’s landmark *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (1940). In that text, historical reflections constitute the majority of the “Capítulos adicionales” [“Additional Chapters”]. Surely, much of the historiography in the two texts stems from shared sources.
positivismo... es más una conducta de sabio que una filosofía científica, una actitud humanista. (35)

[Ortiz initiates a change toward the strictly social; with the complete abandonment of biological concepts he begins to define himself as a promoter and creator of social and cultural studies; and what remains of his positivism is doubtless more fitting as wise conduct rather than scientific philosophy, a humanist attitude]. (35)

Historical contextualization is therefore the mechanism that embraces and explains current social issues.\(^{54}\) This honing of historical scientific practice – using the past to understand the present instead of exclusively focusing on the present – is a far cry from the implementation of straight scientific inquiry in Brujos. The institutional contexts of slavery contribute to our understanding. Ortiz’s mission, however, is once again largely social and pedagogical, as his intent is to “enlighten” republicans and remedy social discord. In so doing, he presents background and, as a result, the farfetched “enlightening” premise of Brujos has now become more tangible.\(^{55}\)

In his preface, Ortiz sees himself as a disciplinary completer and a historical contextualizer. He augments historical analysis with a sociological lens. The all-encompassing approach is significant of a methodological compensation addressed with a scientific continuity.

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\(^{54}\) Viñalet notes an important correlation between the historicity of Esclavos and the authoritative secondary sources on such history, namely nineteenth-century Cuban literature. “Esclavos,” he states, “pone de manifiesto la concepción de Ortiz sobre la capacidad de la literatura para la aprehensión sociohistórica. Por la formación sólida que poseyó, por su conciencia estética y conocimiento profundo de las letras, sabe de las múltiples y complejas relaciones de la literatura con la realidad” [“Esclavos manifests Ortiz’s conception concerning the capacity of literature in sociohistorical apprehension. Via the solid formation that he possessed, his esthetic consciousness, and his deep understanding of letters, he knows about the multiple and complex relations between literature and reality”] (96).

\(^{55}\) Recall Castellanos’s recognition of the authoritative value of Esclavos above.
It is more based, sustainable, and is therefore an authoritative text that has long since outlasted its forerunner. “El presente libro es una modesta contribución a empresa científica de tanta monta. Este libro estudia los negros esclavos, no ya únicamente desde el punto de vista jurídico, ni tampoco desde el filosófico o económico, que interesaron grandemente durante el siglo pasado, cuando las luchas entre esclavistas y antiesclavistas; sino preferentemente desde el punto de vista del sociológico” [“The present book is a modest contribution to the scientific enterprise. This book studies the Black slaves, not only from the juridical point of view, nor from the philosophical or the economical, that were of great interest during the last century when the fights between those for and against slavery existed; but rather primarily from the sociological perspective”] (1996: 14). The criminologist now proclaims himself a sociologist, and in that shift, purports that his new “contribution to the scientific enterprise” incorporates sundry disciplinary positions: law, “philosophy,” “economics,” and, above all, “sociology.” Ortiz’s second major study, then, allots a broader disciplinary base to Afrocuban studies. As we will see in Chapter Three, this amplification will gather momentum in the following decade, when Ortiz inspires a documentary frenzy – stemming from even more disciplines than he mentions here – for the folkloric documentation of Cuban heritages.

The specifics of our ideological reading of Ortiz’s treatment of science in Hampa reveal that as the trilogy progresses, fewer venues for reflection on his scientific methodology are left patent. Whereas Brujos abounds with scientific commentary, and Esclavos has its fare share, Los negros curros does not divulge much disciplinary reflection. Yet in order to maintain chronology, it is important to address the (proposed) revisions Brujos underwent in 1917 and briefly contrast the two editions.
Los negros brujos: 1906 vs. 1917

In the preface to Esclavos, Ortiz comments on an introductory passage he included in his first two essays. The advertencias point to the nature of both studies and explain why Ortiz’s nation-building functions upon examinations of criminal delinquency.

Esta declaración formó parte de las ‘advertencias’ en la edición de mi obra publicada en 1906, con el título de Hampa afro-cubana—Los Negros Brujos. Lo que fue primera parte de ese libro forma hoy, grandemente ampliado y refundido, el presente volumen. La segunda parte de aquél, lo que propiamente constituía el estudio acerca del fetichismo afro-cubano, será objeto de un nuevo volumen, también completamente remozado y más duplicado en su contenido, con el mismo título del anterior. Al lanzar de nuevo a la luz pública el fruto de mis investigaciones sobre estos interesantes temas sociológicos, sólo aspiro a merecer otra vez los halagüeños comentarios con que hace años fue recibido mi primer ensayo. Será ello satisfacción para mí muy honda. (1916: VIII, my emphasis)

[This statement was part of the notes in the edition of my 1906 text under the title of Afrocuban Underworld—The Black Witches. What was originally the first part of that text forms today, greatly amplified and rewritten, the present volume. The second part of the first text examines exclusively Afrocuban fetishism and will be the theme of a new volume, also completely redrawn and more than doubled in content, with the same title as the previous one. Upon placing in the public light
the fruits of my research about these interesting sociological themes, I only aspire to be worthy again of the pleasing comments my first essay received years ago. It will be of great satisfaction for me]. (1916: VIII, my emphasis)

Ortiz’s comments on the supposed revisions intrigue. He explains his removal of an “amplified” and “rewritten” chapter and its insertion in the latter, as he also uses the new introduction to announce the forthcoming revisions of Brujos, itself “completely redrawn and more than doubled in content.” What is more, he promises a “new volume,” presumably separate. Even though Ortiz did publish a new edition of Brujos in 1917, just as his preface promised, comparison of the two editions reveals that, aside from a few structural changes—notably, the removal of the first chapter for its insertion in Esclavos—there is no complete “redrawing” of the text, no doubling of its size, and no “new volume.” In fact, the few changes in the 1917 text are merely stylistic: Ortiz does not amplify or remove a single paragraph. How then can we explain his statement? Why did Ortiz promise amplifications and restructuring of Brujos? Why did he republish the book in 1917 in an almost identical format to its 1906 inaugural edition?

Even when one considers the flux of the entire Hampa enterprise, these broken promises present a dilemma. Ortiz calls for documentary, scientific, completion of his original “obsolete” text, which even he admitted needed to be “rewritten” and “amplified.” He claims to bring the text up to par with his own scientific standards, but he does not do so. Amidst these promised revisions, Ortiz highlights his scientific and historical intentions. “Observemos con escrupulosidad microscópica y reitera nuestros males presentes, que la consideración de su magnitud nos producirá la pesadilla que ha de despertarnos más prontamente de nuestra modorra y nos ha de dar valor y fuerzas para alcanzar la bienandaza futura” [“Let us observe with

56 Could it be Horros, Ñáñigos, or yet another unrealized installment of Hampa Afro-Cubana?
microscopic and reiterated scruple our present problems, with the hopes that the consideration of their magnitude will show us the nightmare that will wake us more quickly from our drowsiness and will give us worth and strength to attain future progress”] (1916: VIII). Curiously enough, this same text is inserted into both editions of Brujos and Esclavos. The passage readily applies to both Ortiz’s atavism in Brujos and his dependence on history in Esclavos, and could be interpreted as the supporting framework for either text.

Perhaps the overzealous documentary enterprise of the project impeded its fruition. Or perhaps heightened university and political activity prevented the changes. One could even put forth that, as his career progressed, Ortiz grew a guilty conscience about the nature of his earlier work, though one cannot be sure. Explanations such as these surmise vague insight, if any at all. What does bear consideration, much as in Pérez Firmat’s theses, is what such editorial volatility means for the reception of Afrocuban scholarship in Cuba. Ortiz is at the center of numerous discursive alterations – changing concepts of nation, national cultures, and even of the scientific practice promoting such debates. And while he is a constantly wavering bibliographic figure, and his work’s greatest constancy is its revisionary inconstancy, it merits recognition that the scenarios surrounding his work were just as inconsistent. From a disciplinary perspective, Afrocuban Studies – and the convergent positions toward national ethnicities – was still forming, it was unsettled. As yet to be fortified in its position and congruous in its treatment of Afrocuba, Afrocuban Studies was still too fresh to garner a thematic constancy inherent to an time-honored discipline. Not only does the change of disciplinary mode between Brujos and Esclavos represent a major scholarly renovation. This speculation about Brujos’s own changeability additionally posits more flux, generating an even greater sense of the unknown surrounding Ortiz’s work.
Los negros curros (1926-1928)

The trilogy’s last published volume, Los negros curros [The Black Thug] (1926-1928, 1981), never saw organic book form during Ortiz’s lifetime. It is the most specific examination of Afrocuban cultural phenomena put forth in the series, and examines in great detail the life of the curro, the emancipated Afrocuban criminal/gangster-of sorts that seems to defy Cuba’s racial dichotomy in its privileged position of urban power and street respect. The study’s focus, even when juxtaposed with those of its ‘trilogy’ antecedents, further fits the bill of Hampa’s imprecision. Likewise, Curros’s chronological development reaffirms such disciplinary unrest. Ortiz’s first treatments of the characters date from a 1909 conference presentation, a 1910 Parisian publication of that presentation entitled “Los negros curros,” and a 1911 collection of illustrations entitled “Los negros curros. Brillante Disertación del Dr. Fernando Ortiz” [“The Black Gangsters: A Brilliant Dissertation by Dr. Fernando Ortiz”]. The 1910 piece is an

57 Palmié addresses the curros as “local African American street culture… a teeming black underworld that formed a counterpoint to the economic parasitism and ostentation of the white elite in its equally parasitic economy of crime and a consciously elaborated culture of conspicuous symbolic subversion – they distinguished themselves via a multitude of details: figure, hairstyle, gait, shirt, trousers, footwear, hat, pieces of clothes they wore, filed teeth, etc.” (151-152).

58 Ortiz states: “Este tema ya fue tratado muy brevemente por nosotros en una conferencia dada en el Ateneo de la Habana, el año 1909, publicada en 1910 en París en un libro titulado Entre Cubanos” [“We already treated this theme very briefly in a conference given in the Ateneo de La Habana, in 1909, published in 1910 in Paris in a book titled Among Cubans”] (1995: 2). Diana Iznaga adds: “En conferencia que, bajo el título ‘Los negros curros,’ pronunciara Fernando Ortiz en fecha tan lejana como 1909, definía el polígrafo los caracteres de este tipo habanero, los cuales sintetizaba en estos tres aspectos: su vanidad, su jerga y su delincuencia; y afirmaba entonces que de todos y cada uno de ellos podía demostrar el origen africano o andaluz, en tanto que acusaba a la corrupción de la sociedad de la época de ser la responsable del nacimiento y subsistencia del tipo” [“In a conference that, under the title of “The Black Gangsters,” Fernando Ortiz gave as long ago as 1909, the polymath defined the traits of this Havana figure, which can be synthesized in these three aspects: vanity, jargon, and delinquency. He affirmed then that for
eighteen-page summary of the scholar’s 1909 presentation, complete with written dialogue and quotations. The 1911 piece is brief (five pages) and includes nine illustrations. Between 1926 and 1928 more substantial portions were previewed in Ortiz’s *Archivos del Folklore Cubano.* These excerpts are much more likened to the style, length, and content of *Curros*’ posthumous editions (1981, 1995), which are “considerably enriched” versions of their originals. As Iznaga notes, “En términos generales, el doctor Ortiz aprovechó para elaborar algunos de los materiales publicados por él entre 1926 y 1928, considerablemente enriquecidos.” [“In general, Dr. Ortiz made good use of elaborating some of the considerably enriched materials published between 1926 and 1928”] (1995: VIII).

In his reading of the *curros’* expressive subversion, Palmié notes that their “bodies were not just surfaces off of which contemporaries unilaterally read signs of grotesque subversion. That surface was a consciously crafted one, and the practices that constituted it aimed, not just to communicate ‘contempt for the existing order’ in the sense of disrespect for the legal inviolability of personal property, but to signal a form of defiant self-possession” (152). Such personality is understandably captivating to sociological study. That such a figure could exist amidst a slaving colony must have piqued Ortiz’s interest, for the *curros’* existence unbalances hegemony’s scales, which boasted even more rigidity during times of slavery. From the outset, we must equate his perception of this Afrocuban phenomenon’s uniqueness – what the critic signals as a “grotesque subversion” that was “consciously crafted” and sought to go against “existing order” – to the *Brujos* premise. In Ortiz’s presentation, black witches embodied the

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same tenets of deviance, subversion, lawlessness and social damage. In *Curros*, Afrocuban deviance once again defies notions of “progress and reform” and impedes national progress. What fascinates here is that these similarities exist in light of the *curro* phenomenon’s historical defunction. In line with *Esclavos*, the text promotes historical analysis/description as a contextualizing remedy for contemporary strives at modernization.

As is to be expected, Ortiz’s analysis in *Curros* is largely descriptive and historically exhaustive. He presents historical considerations of the criminals with the same scrupulousness as he did in *Esclavos*, and dedicates chapters to Seville’s *curros*. As such, Ortiz makes an overt attempt to position the Afrocuban version of this phenomenon in a broader context. Like slavery, black street crime is not an occurrence limited to Cuba, and Ortiz crafts his presentation to declare that Afrocubans are not themselves responsible for it. Palmié notes that this portion of Ortiz’s argument is a stretch. “Ortiz’s own attempts to untangle the resulting complex of strategies of elaborating and projecting versions of Afrocuban selfhood by what essentially were philological means are strikingly naïve. Nevertheless, they are, in principle, instructive…. In the end, Ortiz’ strained attempts to trace the *curros* to any African antecedent known to him seem to have resulted in the massive categorical confusion from which, by the early 1940s, his pathbreaking concept *transculturation* would emerge” (154). Even if it is farfetched, though, it is revealing in relation to the scholar’s later formation.

Implementing his contextual mode and complying with his self-imposed disciplinary standards, Ortiz begins *Curros* with straightforward definitions.

Los curros fueron unos negros y mulatos originarios de Sevilla y peculiares de la ciudad de La Habana, que se distinguieron por su lenguaje, sus vestidos y sus adornos (camisa, pantalón, calzado, sombrero, pañuelo, aretes, anillos), por sus
andares y por su mala vida, de crimen y valentonería, siempre armados de cuchillo en mano: retadores, reverteros y fáciles a las cuchilladas. (1996: 3)

[Curros were blacks and mulattoes originally from Seville and unique to Havana that were distinguishable by their language, their dress, and their adornments (shirt, pants, footwear, hat, kerchief, earrings, rings), by their walk, and by their low-life characteristics of crime and showmanship, always with a knife in their hand: retadores, reverteros, and skilled with knives]. (1996: 3)

Keeping in mind Ortiz’s underlying ideological modifications, these negative descriptors should be examined in terms of the passage’s racial frame (or lack thereof). Aside from the early mention of “blacks” and “mulattoes,” the remaining prose addresses criminal deviance as not inevitably linked to Afrocubans. The types he presents here are distinct based upon dress, speech, and temperament. The immediate result is that the reliance on racial constructs that was so necessary in Brujos and Esclavos is no longer as pressing.

Both the lessened atavistic frame and textual logistics (i.e., the lack of prologue/epilogue space) makes extractions of scientific commentary difficult. But, the last chapter does show a certain aperture in Ortiz’s mode of thinking. In keeping with the less racially motivated rhetoric used in his initial presentation, Ortiz dedicates his last chapter not to the Hampa afro-cubana, but rather to the white criminal underworld.

Una de las causas más decisivas para explicar la mala vida de los negros [en Cuba] anterior al año 1840, es precisamente la mala vida de los blancos. Estos eran los amos y concentraban en sus manos todas las autoridades y poderes. Eran también de cultura y civilización superiores… Y sin embargo, la vida de aquel
tiempo no era en la rica colonia española todo lo moral que hubiera sido de
desar, para servir a la gran masa de población africana que estaba necesitada de

[One of the most decisive causes for explaining the low life of blacks [in Cuba]
prior to 1840 is precisely that of the whites. These were the masters who held in
their hands every authority and power. They were also of superior culture and
civilization…. However, at that time life in the rich Spanish colony was not as
moral as one might wish, to serve the large African population mass that was in
needed models of progress and ethics]. (1995: 195)

Thematically historical again, Ortiz marks the end of his study with discussion of a non-
Afrocuban theme. And while the text’s body offers no scientific reflection per se, his admission
of white guilt or responsibility does indicate an important adjustment to the scientific paradigm.
By treating white crime in a series presumably limited to Afrocubans, Ortiz breaks with the
racially polarized nationalist prerogative and contextualizes an Afrocuban phenomenon with its
white equivalent. Admittedly, this comparison seems to draw still upon the lens employed in
Brujos, as Ortiz even considers white criminals to be of a “superior culture and civilization.”
But, truly scientific in his structure and in his rhetoric, his admission that the curro exists
because of white crime places his analytical lens in a much more specific context than it was in
Brujos. No longer musing about “superstitions in the shadows,” he seems now to be judging
Cuban whites as responsible for social problems as are blacks.

But Ortiz’s mention of Curros in the textual milieu prior to the 1926-1928 publications
vastly complicates things. Returning to the original 1909 conference speech (printed in 1910),
the scholar alleges the following: “Al no poder resistir la generosa demanda de mis amigos, traté de buscar un tema que a la vez pudiera interesar por sí mismo al ilustrado concurso de oyentes habituales a estas fiestas de cultura y no estuviera alejado del radio de mis aficiones y lecturas habituales. Creo haberlo conseguido escogiendo el que ya sabéis: ‘Los negros curros: su explicación sociológica y su orígen [sic] histórico’” [“Not being able to resist the generous demand of my friends, I tried to look for a theme that could simultaneously interest the illustrated gathering of habitual listeners of these cultural parties and that would not be a departure from my own interests and habitual readings. I believe I have done so resting upon already known theme: “The Black Gangsters: their Sociological Explanation and their Historical Origin”] (1910: 156). We cite this passage in order to recognize the original tone and audience of the 1909 event, an erudite gathering. Ortiz claims to “rest upon” the curro because of the figure’s novelty and, importantly, because of its potential role as a catalyst of interest in Afrocuban themes. He privileges his own draw to the case as a platform for advertising Afrocuban studies; as a way of acquiring the discipline a following. To be sure, in 1909 (only three years after Brujos), the foundation of Afrocuban studies is still on shaky ground. In his propagation of it, Ortiz opts for his audience’s “interest” and “illustration.”

Ortiz’s comments on his scientific approach’s historical nature is also intriguing. Once again to his party-going listeners, he recites that “el negro curro es un fósil de la sociedad cubana; un ser que ya no existe y hay que cavar hasta el subsuelo social para encontrar sus restos” [“the black gangster is a fossil of Cuban society; a being that does not exist today so it is necessary to dig to the social subfloor in order to find its remains”] (157). Starkly oppositional from Brujos, Ortiz’s object of analysis happens to be, in this writing, an extinct subject, a “fossil” that no longer plagues society. More interesting is that he mentions how his preliminary analysis
takes no aim at reversing current social problems. This statement is overtly conflictive with respect to the ideology backing the *Hampa* enterprise: the text’s initial purpose seems to be historical curiosity, making no aim at addressing contemporary social problems.

In a surprising contrast, Ortiz invokes later the atavistic premise of his first *Hampa* installment when he states that “No fue capricho del autor sino esfuerzo honrado de sacar a la luz las hediondeces sociales, como paso indispensable para conocerlas y combatir por suprimirlas” [“It wasn’t by the author’s chance but rather an honorable effort to bring to light the social stenches as an indispensable move to understand them and suppress them”] (1992: 2). In contrast to his 1909 words, later rhetoric subsumes the manuscript to the *Hampa* cause and proclaims the need for social cleansing. Dithering contradictions in *Hampa* resurface here and rightly pose further questions. From which perspective did Ortiz construe Curros? When was this prologue written? Unfortunately, the *Hampa*-like rhetoric is not dated; it is merely included (for the first time) in the posthumous editions.

Other than this short phrase, *Curros* is not framed by such a rigorous criminological narrative, nor does it boast significant atavistic reflection on Afrocuban lowlife, witchery, or crime. Instead, Ortiz’s text exhibits very precise boundaries: the topical focus is the *curro* and

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60 Ortiz’s later introduction is in accord with this research method and scientific practice. “Para llenar ese vacío se escriben estas páginas, con la seguridad de que, cualquiera que sea su éxito, siempre se habrá aportado alguna luz al conocimiento de una de las figuras peculiares de la histórica vida popular cubana, y se habrá hecho un nuevo esfuerzo en pro de la arqueología y de la etnografía, tan necesitadas de trabajos acerca de estos fenómenos de las transculturaciones afroamericanas” [“In order to fill that void these pages are written, with the security that, whatever its success, it will always have given some light to the knowledge of one of the peculiar figures of historic popular Cuban life, and a new effort will have been made in favor of archeology and ethnography, so in need of works dealing with these phenomena of African-american transculturation”] (1).
other Afrocuban characters are mentioned only for comparison’s sake. The diminished scientific reflection – that is, textual commentary that treats the scholar’s research premises – and the apparent contradiction, strain the possibility of a link to preceding texts. Logistical reasons could perhaps explain this discontinuity, as Ortiz only published the piecemeal text in installments, and was perhaps denied a venue for inserting the prefaces, research appendices, and epilogues that had been a feature of Brujos and Esclavos. Any national prerogative is hence lessened: no damaging customs need change; no white attitudes need revision. Whereas Ortiz wrote Esclavos in order to enlighten Cuba on the historical causes of present cultural “ailments,” his catalogue of the curros does not exceed mere historical inquiry. It bears repetition, however, that the lessened methodological language could be merely logistical, stemming from editorial constraints.

Curros was published in 1926 lacking both a preface and an epilogue. In other Hampa texts, both of those texts had articulated political motivations in Ortíz’s study of Cuba’s African “problem.” Without such narrative framing devices, Curros becomes an in-depth study of a specific manifestation of Afrocuban culture, though not a scourge that must be healed or cleansed. Moreover, the altered ideological premise becomes more evident when one considers that the manifestations of Afrocuban culture the text treats are in fact, by the time of the Republic, mere “fossils.” That being said, the motivational differences between Brujos and Curros comply with the formative years in the development of Ortíz’s scholarship, a transformation that will define his later scholarly exertions in Afrocuban studies.

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61 For example, his initial comparative analysis of the ñáñigo and the curro (1996: 5-17). For Ortíz, the two represent distinctive characters but adopt many of the same identifying characteristics – costume, speech patterns, etc. His estimation of their ritual, however, places the two in different arenas: the ñáñigo functions on secrecy while the curro necessitates the public spectacle as a means of securing authoritative subversion.
Conclusion. Towards an exhaustive knowledge base: the stage of scholarship

It is difficult to pigeonhole *Hampa afro-cubana* as a coherent series. On some levels the texts embark upon shared ideological and scientific premises. Conversely, *Brujos, Esclavos*, and *Curros* entail editorial, thematic, and chronological discrepancies that only loosely comply with the ‘trilogy’ grouping. Speculation on *Los negros ñáñigos* and *Los negros horros* only complicates matters further. As the series’ irresolute foci are patent, so too do the years spanning the texts correlate to Ortiz’s fluxing ideologies. Briefly put, the overarching pattern of such change seems to correspond to a lessening of the overt nationalist/reformist aim and an ensuing escalation of a more purely scientific mindset. It is indisputable that Ortiz’s ambitions were intensely political at any stage of his career. Between 1906 and 1928, however, one observes a tweaking of Ortiz’s nation-building goal. While so explicitly presented in *Brujos, Esclavos* and *Curros* exemplify such a goal with less candor and embody the seminal phases of scholarly rigor characteristic of Ortiz’s work in the 1930s.

If signals of ideological manipulation and political impetus are at times blurred over the course of the production of *Hampa afro-cubana*, a definitive event in Ortiz’s life – exile – marks the solidification of this change. Upon returning from the United States, Ortiz’s political involvement wholly changed, to the point that he was no longer an official representative of the governing body in any of its offices. His scholarship suffered a change as well, as it became increasingly focused on Afrocuban ethnography. The scholar now instilled in his work non-atavistic celebrations of Cuba’s Africanness; national reform was thenceforth framed within rigorous scholarly exercise. With the founding of the *Sociedad de Estudios Afrocubanos* (1937), Ortiz evidenced an altered stance toward Afrocuba.
The next chapter deals with the stage of scholarship that predates Ortiz’s break with the government of Cuban president Gerardo Machado and his eventual exile. A key enterprise during these years, the journal *Archivos del Folklore Cubano* (1924-1930), marks an additional facet of Ortiz’s bibliographical development and points to the shifting features of his nationalist and academic undertaking. *Archivos* is the medium through which Ortiz inspired the scientific discovery of Cuban folklore – and, by extension, Afrocuba – before his political withdrawal. While these reflections on the scientific documentation of (Afro) Cuban folklore at times still indicate Ortiz’s wavering postures toward Afrocubans, the publication of *Archivos* epitomizes an intermediary ideological stage crucial to understanding his research in the 1930s and beyond.
Chapter Three, Archival Validation: Structuring Afrocuban Scholarship (1924-1930)

By the 1920s, the mania of all things Afrocuban, what Moore has called the “Afrocubanophile frenzy,” was securely in place in popular culture and intellectual circles facing the aftermath of the 1912 Race War (2).62 “The first qualified valorization of Afrocuban arts by the intellectual elite and their acceptance as the valuable heritage of the entire nation date from the 1920s and 1930s” (Moore 1). During this period, Cuba witnessed intensified discussions of Afro-Hispanic issues in literary and artistic production as well as in political discourse, a trend that would continue beyond the setbacks of the Machado era.63 As the island progressed slowly toward constitutional social reform, a course of action that culminated with the 1940

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62 This celebration of Afrocuban culture is surprising considering the heightened racism toward Afrocubans preceding the 1920s. Fermoselle highlights the underlying racial resentment among both black and white Cubans that preceded the conflict. One of the “indirect causes” of the war, he states, was the “resurgimiento de los antagonismos raciales en Cuba después de 1898” [“the resurgence of racial antagonism in Cuba following 1898”] (168). He observes the most direct consequence of this “antagonism”: “Incrementaron las tensiones que existían en [La Habana] y dieron como resultado que los negros empezaran a armarse para protegerse” [“tensions in Havana increased and the result was that the blacks began to arm themselves for protection”] (141). Correspondingly, Helg notes that the 1912 war “unmasked the depth and scale of racist feelings that had accumulated in the white population during the previous decades. In 1912, violence against blacks greatly exceeded the levels reached after the abolition of slavery, during the War for Independence, and in the 1900s. Although physical attacks were the most dramatic evidence of racial hatred, black-bashing was one of the most revealing expressions of continuing racism in Cuba” (234). De la Fuente observes how the presence of blacks in public places made the racial climate all the more tense: “Blacks’ unrestricted access to parks, streets, and other spaces represented a visible indicator of their ‘place’ in society and a daily test of the validity and veracity of Cuba’s racial fraternity” (78).

63 Even though the valorization of Afrocuban ideals by non-African intellectual constituents accelerated over the course of the 1920s, Moore notes that the nationalist drive to incorporate Afrocuban imagery into national symbolism climaxed immediately following Machado’s exile, in 1933, a time when “the country’s intellectual elite attempted more actively to promote uniquely Cuban cultural forms” (2).
Constitution, issues involving blacks in Cuba were brought to the front of almost every aspect of social, political, and economic life.64

Clearly, more frequent expressions of Afro-Cuban cultural representations, coupled with the legitimized acceptance of Afro-Cuban art forms by the non-blacks who controlled most cultural production, must be equated with the appropriation of Afro-Cuban symbolism at national levels. In Moore’s words, “The arts of socially marginalized blacks, for centuries ignored or dismissed by Cuba’s middle classes, took on new significance as symbols of nationality” (2). Correspondingly, the rapidly changing perceptions of Afro-Cubans and their forms of artistic expression affected “the attitudes of the white majority toward the noncommercial expression of Afro-Cubans themselves and [inspired] Afro-Cubanist works among their own ranks. This *afrocubanismo* ‘moment’ influenced virtually all domains of art, elite and popular” (2). Thus, worldwide music and fashion trends transformed Cuba into an exotic tropical showcase, and the nation became the emanating point of cultural transmission of new currents of jazz, folk music, and love ballads.65 As representations of African heritage emanated trans-Atlantically and found a hotbed of support in the avant-garde intellectual and artistic circles of Paris, africanisms, including music, dance, dress, drama and speech patterns, gained a stronghold in art.

The rise of *art nègre* to prominence, in Archer-Straw’s estimation, came about as a “more studied approach to art from Africa [which] gradually emerged in the postwar years. Its

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64 It is important to consider the rapid social mobilization undergone by Afro-Cubans since the inception of the republic both as a key precedent of the 1912 war and as an important determinant of Afro-Cuban social mobility after the event. Despite the heightened racist climate following the war, the entrance of blacks into sociopolitical hierarchies, albeit limited, was an important predecessor to black artistry in the 1920s. According to Domínguez, “blacks,” especially in Oriente, “were geographically concentrated and changing their skills very quickly, at a rate that was high both in absolute and relative terms” (47).

65 Moore highlights the “phenomenal national and international popularity of Cuban *son* and commercial *rumba* bands” (3).
legitimation came out of a mutual exchange of ideas and activities between ethnographers and artists. An interdisciplinary network of thinkers involved in the study and promotion of primitive art developed” (60). Thus international celebrations of African heritage coincided with outward domestic efforts to intercalate “Africanness” into the Cuban national symbolic registry. L’*art nègre* pivotaly facilitated such a discovery of Cuban symbols, as remarked by Lydia Cabrera in her famous statement: “Sería por el año 1928: había descubierto a Cuba a orillas del Sena” [“It was around 1928: I had discovered Cuba by the Seine"] (Cabrera in Hiriart 1980: 23). Although the French celebration of l’*art nègre* was certainly influential on its Cuban counterpart, the cultural functions of both celebrations of African heritages were quite different. In Paris, African art forms emanated from colonial subjects; the artifacts of *art nègre* left Africa and became the mainstays of a foreign culture. Cuban culture, on the other hand, profited from Parisian inspiration and its glorified artistry of indigenous Afrocuban heritages. That is to say,  

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66 As we will see, this linkage between artistry and scientific pursuits is crucial for Ortiz and his *Sociedad del Folklore Cubano* in this same decade, although its French counterpart realized a different function. French valorization of l’*art nègre* must be considered a reaction to the juxtaposition of colonialism and modernity that characterized French politics and bohemian art in the first third of the twentieth century. Archer-Straw notes: “Paris’s avant-garde artists were the first to co-opt black culture to promote their ideas about modernity. Black imagery, whether drawn from popular culture or from African carvings, suited the modern artist’s need for inspiration, difference and subversion” (51). The critic also notes that “French interest in their colonized peoples went beyond economic considerations. The avant-garde’s admiration and borrowing of negro forms was as much to satisfy its own need for the ‘exotic’ and the ‘real’ as it was for economic exploitation. The allure of black culture was that it stood for a spiritual wholeness that had been obscured in an increasingly ‘civilized’ and mechanized environment by layers of material development. The assimilation of black forms into Parisian sub-culture was remedial and therapeutic. The Parisian artist became a modern primitive who acted out a ritual function... by absorbing and re-creating... fetishes in his work. Thus the image and ‘depiction’ of ‘blackness’ served as an antedote [sic] for easing psychic and spiritual needs of its dislocated and disenchanted bohemian society” (18). Conversely, Afrocuban artistry, and the body of scientific research supporting it, was a source of nationalism in the republican quest for uniquely Cuban culture. Whereas the French avant-garde situation was one of immigration – that is, artifacts of l’*art nègre* traveled to Paris – Afrocuban art was native, indigenous to the island, and thereby inspired homeland pride.
African artistry in Cuba was a manifestation of permanently-incorporated heritages that are expressions of the Cuban nation itself, not a colonial extension of it. Whereas France imported ‘Africanness,’ Cuba is African. To this effect, Thomas notes that “by 1920 there was a tendency to identify the ‘real’ Cuba with the Negroes… especially after the dawning realization of the contribution made to Cuban rhythm, dancing, folklore, generally by Negroes – a realization which began seriously to gather weight from about 1906 under the inspiration of Fernando Ortiz” (601-602). In this way, the African was embraced as a valid, nationally definitive heritage.

Ortiz, his collaborators, and the ever-growing body of scholars under their tutelage encouraged their own participation in the valorization of African symbolism within the national imaginary through their organization, the Sociedad del Folklore Cubano [Cuban Folklore Society]. Founded in 1923 under the direction of both Enrique José Varona and Ortiz, the group came about at the precise time when a base of encyclopedic knowledge was needed to complement the treatments of Afrocuban subjects in popular currents, particularly music and dance (Moore 125). The Folklore Society was born out of its parent organization, the Sociedad

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67 Fermoselle notes that pre- and post-1912 Afrocubans “creían todavía en los ideales del movimiento independentista… y se consideraban cubanos primero y negros después” [“Blacks still believed in the ideals of the independence movement… and considered themselves more Cuban than black”] (171).

68 In their 1930 commentary on a Parisian l’art nègre exposition, Maes and Lavachery state simply that “L’étude de l’art nègre ne peut, à notre avis, être fait dans un seul cadre” [“The study of l’art nègre cannot, as we see it, be done within a single frame”] (9). Referring to the variety of African heritages present in l’art nègre within Paris, the commentators attest to the role of regional appropriations of the African-inspired art in the trajectory of the movement. Avant-garde artistic circles, as their commentary makes evident, were extremely aware of the regional specificity of l’art nègre and they note, more specifically, how different ambits make use of regional artistries. Afrocuban celebrations of African heritage are one such appropriation.

69 While these efforts at scientifically founding national art forms did meet a certain need at the time, it is important to consider how the scientific efforts were construed amidst post-1912 attitudes toward Afrocubans. Artistic and scholarly legitimization, hence, also serve the purposes of minimizing racism and constructing “unified” nationhood. As evidenced in studies
Económica de Amigos del País, an extremely influential, select group of key white Cuban intellectuals, politicians, and economists that was founded in 1793. The Revista Bimestre Cubana [The Cuban Bimonthly Magazine], the Economic Society’s publication, typically included writings from prominent Cuban thinkers, including Ortiz, Raimundo Cabrera (Ortiz’s father-in-law and co-director), Jorge Mañach, Herminio Portell-Vilá, and Raúl Maestri. It also published work from prominent political and scholarly figures from the United States, Mexico, Puerto Rico and Spain (Esquenazi-Mayo 59). One critic notes that Ortiz was central to the journal’s reinstatement, and that it was one of the scholar’s “favorite undertakings:” “Ortiz’s intellectual influence upon this revista was paramount, as he was not only a highly productive and respected scholar himself, but also searched incessantly for new talent to contribute to” it (Esquenazi-Mayo 57). As an integral figure in the life of both societies, Ortiz maintained connections to Cuba’s elite through the Sociedad Económica, while the Folklore Society was the magnet that attracted younger scholars to specifically folkloric studies, an outlet that became a key ingredient of his nationalist enterprise. The Folklore Society thus became the forum for cataloguing and imposing scholarly order to new cultural art forms. Its serial publication, Archivos del Folklore Cubano [Archives of Cuban Folklore] (1924-1930), documented the folk cultural practices that were attaining popularity, then including material on Cuba’s Hispanic, African, Asian and aboriginal legacies. Matos Arévalo situates the journal in the context of the “historical renovation” undertaken by Ortiz in its direction: “Esta revista se convirtió en un

by Helg, de la Fuente, and Fermoselle, however, racism still gripped Cuba, even at the peak Afrocuban artistic valorization.

70 The Revista Bimestre Cubana (1831-1834, 1910-1959) was arguably one of the most influential pre-Revolutionary intellectual journals.

71 While the journal dealt with all folkloric legacies in Cuba, we will be dealing principally with its treatment of Afrocuban folklore, particularly in light of the major renovation of Afrocuban cultural expression in the 1930s.
verdadero vehículo cultural de indagación en la vida popular cubana” [“This journal was converted into a true cultural vehicle of investigations into popular Cuban life”] (41). Thus, as a “cultural vehicle,” Archivos melded intellectual and popular fronts: by constructing an encyclopedic base for newly valorized forms of Afrocuban artistic expression, the journal validated such expressions with an authoritative scholarly presence and inspired more artistic expression through Afrocuban art forms. Of the Archivos, Esquenazi-Mayo states: “The main objective of this publication was to encourage among both established and younger scholars serious research in history, literature, and folklore” (6). As we will see, Ortiz’s quest to inspire younger scholars to take interest in indigenous lore engages a nationalist rhetoric and establishes a connection between nation-building and folkloric research. The Revista Bimestre de Cuba, on the other hand, remained a high-ranking venue and thereby disseminated white-Cuban discourse on domestic and international crises within a type of elitist nationalism.

Archivos del Folclor Cubano: nationalist scholarship

The scholars in the Sociedad del Folclor Cubano put forth their journal for nearly seven years, from January 1924 through September 1930. Five volumes of varying length were

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72 Moore believes, conversely, that the Society was less valorizing of Afrocuba and rather more traditional in its concept of folklore: “The central goal of the Folklore Society… was the ‘national reconstruction’ of Cuba through the valorization of its arts and culture. Ostensibly designed to study all types of folklore, members concentrated almost exclusively on Hispanicisms during the first five years. Those present at initial meetings… avoided discussion of Afrocuban arts” (126). It is interesting to note here that the critic makes no mention of the journal, only of the Society itself. Whereas Moore observes an ignorance of the Afrocuban thematic, I contend that the journal acted as an inaugural forum for Afrocuban anthropological and literary expression. It is also important to acknowledge that some of these motivations could still be serving as corrective mechanisms for the change in Cuban politics after the 1912 war.

73 A critical text of this type being Ortiz’s compilation of his famous speech, “La crisis política cubana, sus causas y sus remedios,” from 1919 (Esquenazi-Mayo 59).
published, with the average annual volume comprising four issues.\textsuperscript{74} As a serial publication, the journal contained several repeated shorts that ran from issue to issue, as in Ortiz’s “La fiesta cubana del ‘Día de Reyes’” [“The Cuban Day of Kings Festival”] and \textit{Los negros curros}.\textsuperscript{75} Other features of the journal were typically repeated with work by various contributors, including “El folklore del niño cubano” [“The Folklore of the Cuban Child”], “Juegos infantiles cubanos” [“Cuban Childrens Games”], “Personajes del folklore afrocubano” [“Characters of Afrocuban Folklore”], “Cuestionario folklórico” [“Folkloric Questionnaire”], “Instrumentos musicales de los Afrocubanos” [“Musical Instruments of the Afrocubans”], and “Costumbres populares cubanas” [“Popular Cuban Customs”]. Each publication ended with brief sections dealing with Society business, meeting notes, tables of contents, and bibliographies. The journal typically included works by Ortiz, historians Herminio Portell-Vilá, Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, Israel Castellanos, and philologist José María Chacón y Calvo. Aside from the serial publications within \textit{Archivos}, the journal was a forum for various genres of literature and scholarship, as prepared by numerous contributors. Published texts encompassed both literary genres – short pieces of Afrocuban lore, short fiction, poetry, music and \textit{costumbrista} texts – and scholarly contributions – literary criticism, book reviews, bibliographies, catalogs of popular sayings, dictionaries of Afrocuban religious terms, Afrocuban glossaries, linguistic research on popular expressions, biographies of ethnographers, etc. More specifically, the material published in \textit{Archivos} can be described according to the following general scheme: (1) articles in the white/European tradition dealing with nineteenth-century Havana \textit{costumbrista} folklore (mostly

\textsuperscript{74} The following is a brief outline of the chronology of \textit{Archivos}: Volume 1, Issues 1-4 (1924-1925); Volume 2, Issues 1-4 (1925-1926); Volume 3, Issues 1-4 (1927-1928); Volume 4, Issues 1-4 (1929); and, Volume 5, Issues 1-3 (1930).

\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Los negros curros}, the third text in Ortiz’s \textit{Hampa afrocubana} series, appeared in \textit{Archivos} in 1926 and 1928 (Volumes 2.3 through 3.4). Although this is perhaps the most influential serial publication within the journal, for continuity’s sake I examine the text in the Chapter Two.
reprints); (2) studies of Cuban lexicology and lexicography; (3) a large body of Afrocuban anthropological work, often in the form of serial repetitions, which functioned as the most open forum for the discussion of Afrocuban folklore; (4) reprints of historical texts from major Cuban figures dealing with race, ethnicity, religion, history and folklore; (5) catalog or glossary texts as sources on white and non-white heritage; (6) descriptions and bibliographies on folk research and its course after the advent of the *Sociedad del Folklore Cubano*; and finally, (7) works of short fiction. The following tables demonstrate the frequency of published texts on Afrocuban folklore over the journal’s course:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-Afrocuban anthropology, fiction, lexicology and lexicography</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>26.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Afrocuban anthropology, fiction, lexicology and lexicography</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>23.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Afrocuban anthropology, fiction, lexicology and lexicography</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>50.5</td>
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<td>TOTAL</td>
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Out of the 190 total items *Archivos* published, almost one-fourth deal specifically with Afrocuban lore. While this does not represent an exclusive dedication to Afrocuban studies, the amount of critical attention given to Cuba’s ‘Africanness’ is certainly substantial. Suffice it to say that it was the first time that a national journal devoted as much space to this topic, a fact in and of itself monumental to Afrocuba’s trajectory. Furthermore, when one considers the amount of Afrocuban material (23.2 percent) and the frequent inclusion of publications dedicated to folk research methodologies (26.3 percent), it can be seen that one-half of *Archivos* (49.5 percent)
treats the study of Cuban heritage and Afrocuban folklore as a formative component of the nation-building enterprise.

An overview of the journal’s table of contents shows that the first Afrocuban works of fiction appear in Volume Four (1928), in Archivos’ fourth year of publication. Indeed, volume Five (1929-30) is the only one with an overt focus on Afrocuban narrative. Could it be said that the body of written work addressing folklore built a base for later forms of Afrocuban fiction – that is, expression accepted as valid on national levels? As we will see, this question is at once valid and invalid. As noted in our introduction, it would be extreme to demarcate a cause-and-effect relationship between Ortiz and Afrocuban art; yet to deem that there was no relationship between the two camps would minimize their mutual influence. Several factors, such as the close chronological proximity of Ortiz’s projects and Afrocubanismo’s mainstays and Ortiz’s personal relationship with many of its (literary) proponents, point to several points of coincidence. Placing such connections aside, it remains clear that Archivos lived up to its name: it became a vast store of catalogued information fusing criticism and folklore. Hence, Ortiz fused the Society with a bibliographical beacon, an information-gathering symbol meant to maintain the ideals of scientific inquiry and cultural cataloguing. Through the body of scientific research surrounding the journal and the Folklore Society, folklorists in effect documented Cuba; in that process, they structured Afrocuban scholarship as a justifiable discipline. Afrocuban cultural expression thus gained legitimacy as well.76

76 In a short article entitled “Origen de los Afro-Cubanos” (1916), Ortiz makes an early claim to the importance of Afrocuban lore: “Hasta nuestro folk-lore conserva en sus expresiones el nombre de países afrocubanos…” [“Even our folkloric expressions conserve the name of African countries...”] (238). Archivos must thereby be seen as another component of Ortiz’s ever-developing disciplinary maneuvers.
The linkage of scholarly lexicon and popular lore – which, for our own reading of Ortiz’s nationalist rhetoric, provides an important binary opposition – is shown most overtly in the prologues and epilogues to the journal’s inaugural publication (January 1924). Ortiz’s frame of the inaugural issue demonstrates precisely the fusion of popular and elite cultures that the Society sought to achieve in its scientific pursuits. Ortiz posits the first issue’s scholarly content, comprising roughly seventy pages of published articles and bibliographies, between two differing reflections. On the one hand, his preface embraces an inspirational rhetoric to outline the Society’s purpose and function amidst a spiritual quest for national understanding; on the other, his epilogue lays out, in a dry, instructive fashion, the impetus for that purpose: how the Society logistically plans to disseminate its information on folklore. Rhetorical differences as oppositional as these can be readily found throughout the journal’s seven years. Thus Ortiz opens the first issue by calling for a “stimulated” interest in the “soul,” “spirit,” and “genius” of Cuba’s folkloric heritages:

Más que el exponente de un notable progreso que hubiere alcanzado Cuba en esa rama de los conocimientos humanos, que universalmente se llama hoy del folklore, quiere ser esta publicación un estímulo para las iniciativas folklóricas cubanas, un recuerdo de los adelantos ya obtenidos y un órgano de colaboración y cambio de ideas entre los que en Cuba gustan de escudriñar el pasado, de saborear los frutos del saber popular y de curiosear el alma de nuestro pueblo en lo que tiene de más propio y tradicional…. No solo la del alma blanca… sino la del espíritu indio o cobrizo de los aborígenes, la del genio negro o etiópico de los antiguos esclavos africanos, y hasta la del carácter asiático o amarillo. (5-6)
[More than an indicator of a notable progress that Cuba will have reached in the branch of human knowledge universally known today as folklore, this publication wants to be a stimulant of Cuban folklore initiatives, a memory of the progress already obtained, and an organ of collaboration and exchange of ideas between those Cubans who enjoy contemplating the past, savoring the fruits of popular knowledge and inquiring the soul of our people in that which is our own, traditional… Not only that of the white soul… but also that of the Indian or dark spirit of the aborigines, that of the black or Ethiopian disposition of the former African slaves, and even that of the spirit of the Asian or yellow character]. (5-6)

Ortiz’s nostalgic treatment of Cuban history, and its folk content, are an emotive nationalist call. He hopes to stimulate “folkloric initiatives” by way of inspiring an evaluation of the past, achieving his objective via a nationalist premise. Regarding this aim, Kutzinski points out that “[a]nthropology and literature collaborated in amalgamating nationalism and culture into a depoliticized ethnographic discourse whose effect was both to recuperate and to absorb la gente de color through their folklore” (145). While we find it difficult to claim that any discourse authored by Ortiz could be “depoliticized,” Kutzinski’s reading is nevertheless useful. Ortiz is most concerned with disseminating information on folklore through the “recuperation” of local heritage. From a strictly nationalist standpoint, such scholarly exposition “absorbs” all non-Spanish traditions into a unified ambit, and thus posits the scholarship/lore opposition in an inclusive package. It is telling that Ortiz constructs his introduction to Archivos according to

77 The notion of a “depoliticized” Ortiz is even more inconceivable when one considers his central involvement in the Revista Bimestre Cubana and the Economic Society in the time period leading up to and including the 1920s, times when he served as a representative and as vice president of the Cámara. See Bronfman’s “Reforming Race in Cuba, 1902-1940” (2000) for an excellent presentation of Ortiz’s political involvement in these years.
assertions of social unity, not of hierarchy. In this way, the nationalist motivations that guide the journal’s quest to promote an archival treatment of all Cuban legacies.

Ortiz posits the remainder of his charge for a recuperative and unifying folklore metaphorically:

Lo rudimentario de los trabajos de exploración hechos hasta el presente nos hace pensar en un campo estéril y árido donde el cultivador folklorista no ha de poder hallar compensación en sus afanes. Y, sin embargo, la simple consideración de los frutos ya obtenidos cuando el terreno está aún cubierto de monte firme y densa manigua, hace augurar óptimas cosechas para el día en que una vigorosa labor de investigación y análisis desmonte, faguere y haga penetrar el arado en las tierras vírgenes. (7)

[The basic premise of the exploratory works completed up to the present reminds us of a sterile and arid field in which the folklorist-cultivator cannot find compensation for his work. However, the simple consideration of the fruits already obtained, while the land still remains covered with solid mountains and dense foliage, calls for optimal harvests when the vigorous investigative and analytical labor clears and the plough finally penetrates the virgin land]. (7)

In this registry of agricultural imagery, Ortiz (literally) roots nationalism in the land. Once again feeding upon an ideal of national unity, he postulates this agro-economic metaphor for Cuban nationalism as a function of anti-North American sentiment.78 In such a scenario, the cultivador

78 Thomas notes that in 1920, the Cuban sugar industry – though increasingly less Cuban and more North American – entered into the Dance of the Millions: “1920 was the grand climacteric in the history of Cuban sugar, and a landmark in the history of capitalism” (543). As prices were
the Cuban folklorist – restores the “sterile” and “arid” land, bringing it “fruitful harvests.”

Documenting insular traditions thus facilitates the coalescence of people and land, allotting them cultural celebrations that strengthen resistance to foreigners, be they North American or Spanish. As early as 1924, then, Ortiz was articulating a position against foreign economic intervention, a theme he will revisit in the texts and speeches he went on to publish in the Revista Bimestre Cubana, as well as his most famous Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar [Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar] (1940).79

As Ortiz completes his metaphor by establishing an imaginary linkage between land and nation, a gesture that further justifies his call for a scholarly catalog of Cuban folklore, he concludes: “Todo un tesoro yace oculto bajo las modernas capas de cultura, esperando a los cubanos estudiosos que lo descubran, interpretren, clasifiquen y fijen para la civilización nacional” [“An entire treasure lies hidden beneath the cap of modern culture, waiting for studious Cubans to discover it, interpret it, classify it, and make it firm for national civilization”] (7). After linking nation and land, Ortiz’s further metaphor equates nation and text. Nations are built upon textual foundations, and “modern culture” is built upon, or out of, an archival enterprise – hence the literal meaning and importance of Archivos [Archives] as a documentary

“well above any previous price every obtained,” the North American economic stronghold on the island fortified (543). 79 In one such speech, delivered to the Sociedad de Amigos del País in February 1924 – just one month after the inaugural issue of Archivos – Ortiz states the following: “Con el impulso unido de esas positivas fuerzas cubanas será posible que la Nación se reconquiste a sí misma, recupere estos pasados lustros perdidos en desvarío y locura, y haga vivir el mortecino ideal de los libertadores,... Y fortificarnos con todas las armas de cultura, mediante el único programa capaz de renovar a Cuba y darle nueva virilidad de gloria; abriendo cárcceles para el pasado, carreteras para el presente, y escuelas para el porvenir.” [“With the unified impulse of these positive Cuban forces it will be possible for the Nation to re-conquer itself, recuperate those shining pasts lost in delirium and madness, and make the failing ideal of the liberators come to life.... And fortify ourselves with all of the cultural arms, by way of the only program capable of renovating Cuba and giving it a new glorious virility; opening jails for the past, highways for the present, and schools for the future”] (32).
means of constructing national symbols. The journal’s inception, then, is modeled after a perceived need for Cubans to look internally to their own heritage so as to construct an identity in textual form, based upon an understanding and explanation of their folk past.

In the epilogue, at the end of the inaugural issue of Archivos, Ortiz cements the Society’s motivation without revisiting the nationalist jargon of his prologue and instead assumes a greater academic tone. Thus the “Actas de la Sociedad del Folklore Cubano” [“Acts of the Cuban Folklore Society”], includes a series of notes that discuss the research method by which the Society’s members should conduct folk research. Scholarly and straightforward in nature, the instrucciones cap a rhetorical style opposite to the preface’s. Although lengthy, they are worth citing in detail.

La Sociedad del Folklore Cubano tiene por objeto acopiar, clasificar y comparar los elementos tradicionales de nuestra vida popular. Así, con materias propias de esta Sociedad, la recopilación y estudios de los cuentos, las consejas, las leyendas conservados por la tradición oral de nuestro pueblo; los romances, las décimas, los cantares, los boleros y otras manifestaciones típicas de nuestra poesía y nuestra música populares; las locuciones, los giros típicos, los trabalenguas, los cubanismos y tantas otras formas de la filología popular; los refranes, proverbios, adivinanzas y otros modos de expresión característicos del ingenio de los pueblos; los conocimientos populares, conservados por la tradición, referentes a los distintos ramos de la ciencia (geografía, botánica, medicina, agricultura); las creencias fantásticas y sobrenaturales, las supersticiones en que expresa nuestro pueblo su sentido de lo maravilloso; la descripción y estudio, asimismo, de las costumbres locales; las fiestas y ceremonias populares, los juegos infantiles, los
bailes, y por último, el estudio descriptivo, encaminando a un fin de verdadera terapéutica social, de ciertas prácticas morbosas\textsuperscript{80}, como los actos de brujería y ñañiguismo, en que, en forma tan expresiva, se manifiesta la baja vida popular. Promoverá también la Sociedad investigaciones referentes a nuestro pasado precolombino, procurando señalar los rastros que pudieran existir en nuestra vida tradicional, del espíritu de los aborígenes de Cuba. (78)

[The Folklore Society intends to collect, classify, and compare the traditional elements of our folk life. Thus, by way of the Society’s own doing, the recompilation and study of short stories, fables, legends conserved by the oral tradition of our people; romances, décimas, chants, boleros and other typical manifestations of our poetry and our popular music; the phrasings, typical sayings, tongue twisters, cubanismos, and many other forms of popular philology; refrains, proverbs, riddles and other forms of expression characteristic of the intelligence of the people; pieces of popular lore, conserved by tradition, referring to the distinctive branches of science (geography, botany, medicine, agriculture); fantastic and supernatural beliefs, superstitions in which our people expresses its sense of the marvelous; the description and study, thus, of local customs; festivals and popular celebrations, children’s games, dances, and finally, descriptive study leading to a true source of social therapy, of certain morbid practices\textsuperscript{81}, such as

\textsuperscript{80} Obviously, Ortiz’s ideological considerations of Afrocuban religious practices are still evolving. Chapter Two includes a detailed analysis of the formative years of this disciplinary ideology while Chapter Four deals with the culmination of this change, marked by a public apology from Ortiz to his student, Rómulo Lachatañeré, for his derogatory use of the term brujo. \textsuperscript{81} See previous note.
acts of witchcraft and ñañiguismo in which popular life manifests itself in
expressive form. The Society will also support investigations dealing with our
pre-Columbian past, signaling the traces of aboriginal spirit of Cuba that could
exist in our tradition]. (78)

It is clear in these statements that Cuban nationalism seeks its base in science. Nationalist fervor
must thereby be contained within, or structured by, the scientific tenets Ortiz highlights: scrutiny
of evidence and exhaustive positivistic compilation. Such is the precise method by which
Cubans understand their national heritage. In the hopes of impressing upon the “Cuban people,”
the folk, its need for familiarity with Cuban history and folklore, Ortiz constructs this conclusion
like a user’s manual: he presents the specifics of his plan to cement such ideals within the work-
ethic of his collaborators and followers. He thus makes clear in the “Actas” a critical component
of the research method that he believed the group should undertake while cataloguing Cuban
folklore, and states the following: “[a]unque la Sociedad del Folklore Cubano tiene un alto
respeto por el trabajo individual y cree temerario fijar principios apriorísticos para las
investigaciones, quiere formular en sus bases de constitución la Doctrina de la más escrupulosa
fidelidad, expresándola así: ningún recopilador debe alterar lo que oye del narrador: respete su
gramática, su lógica, su espíritu” [“Even though the Folklore Society possesses much respect for
individual work and believes it necessary to use prudent principles in investigations, it wishes to
formulate at its constitutive bases a doctrine of scrupulous faithfulness, expressed in this way: no
compiler should alter what he/she hears from the narrator: respect his/her grammar, logic and
spirit”] (79). In this way Ortiz binds science, land, and people, and in so doing reasserts his
nationalist ideal. His previous metaphor rooted nationalist scientific inquiry in the land. No
longer speaking metaphorically, Ortiz now makes his point directly: authentic scientific practice is fundamentally beneficial to the nation.

Nothing encompasses this dual-sided ideal and its rhetorical execution more than the Society’s pictorial logo, which was published for the first time, with a brief textual explanation, in Archivos’ second issue (April 1924). The image, comprised of a black cat walking along a rooftop with a star in the background and the words “SOCIEDAD DEL FOLKLORE CUBANO” below in white, captures the dichotomy of currents inherent in the Society’s nationalist premise. In “De la Sociedad del Folklore Cubano,” Ortiz states that the cat – “la buena suerte” [“good luck”] – is illuminated by the star – “signo del ideal cubano” [“sign of the Cuban ideal”] (187). The star, an obvious symbol of the nation, casts light from behind, moving the shadows toward the viewer and thus shedding light on folk superstitions. By placing nation behind folk, the nation/star background serves as the illuminating agent of the local/lore foreground. Nation-building, then, is necessarily built upon the enlightenment of indigenous lore: it is a natural extension of that process.

Finally, at the close of this first epilogue and in an act of plain acknowledgement of his intent, Ortiz evokes the nationalist ideology behind the Society’s formation and its journal’s purpose: “Un fin nacionalista, de amplia reconstrucción nacional, ha de presidir los trabajos de los fokloristas cubanos… pues tienen una gran interés para la cultura cubana” [“A nationalist end, one of overall national reconstruction, must guide the work of Cuban folklorists… they have great interest for Cuban culture”] (92). As a constituent of Cuba’s “national reconstruction,” the

82 It is important to point out that Ortiz notes that the black cat in Cuba represents good luck: “el gato negro’ que folklóricamente significa aquí la buena suerte…” [“the black cat,’ which in terms of folklore signifies here good luck…”] (187).
83 Ortiz often used the expression “Ciencia, conciencia, paciencia” as an underlying motto to his work. This “consciousness” is brought to the “Cuban people” via the folklorist who takes pride in investigating his/her indigenous lore.
documentary motivations of folk anthropology comply with nationalism by building a base of knowledge, a literal *archivo*, upon existing traditions. It is such knowledge that will eventually infiltrate artistic ambiets and change the course of (Afro) Cuban artistry. Due to the relative infrequency of artistic material in the *Archivos del Folklore Cubano*, any analytical approximation to the journal as a whole ought, therefore, to begin with the publication’s scholarly – archival – material. For the sake of coherence, we will limit our discussion to that material which addresses the study of folklore.

The Society’s prerogative is upheld by the amount of scientific attention dedicated to the logistics of maintaining folk research methodology. These include the appearance of “Advertencias” [“Notices”] on how to conduct research, “Notas” [“Notes”] on methods of folkloric cataloguing, “Collectáneas,” or open fora whereby readers become privy to the evolution of the discipline, and extensive “Bibliografías” [“Bibliographies”] published in article form. In “La ciencia del folklore” [“The Science of Folklore”] (1928), for example, Aurelio M. Espinosa addresses, by way of conceptual definitions, the Society’s progress towards its goals: “Recoger fielmente los documentos folklóricos y publicarlos esmeradamente es prestar grandes servicios a la ciencia folklórica; pero la ciencia misma del folklore no nace hasta que no se trata de interpretar los materiales folklóricos para buscar en ellos la historia del pueblo, su significado para la ciencia” [“A faithful collection and publication of folkloric documents offers great service to the folkloric science; but the science itself is not born until it no longer tries to interpret folkloric materials for the purposes of finding in them a history of the people, its significance for science”] (293). This premise, taken almost verbatim from Ortiz’s 1924 preface, reveals continuity in the scope of the Society’s purpose. But Espinosa’s own innovation lies in his adaptation of “science” to the end of serving “literary art:” “Mi tema es la ciencia del
folklore,” he writes, “y he tratado de explicar cómo y por qué el folklore es una ciencia, una


ciencia histórica en su mayor parte, que hoy día tiene la importancia de otras y sirve de ciencia

auxiliar para otras. Pero el folklore tiene también y muy especialmente su parte artística. Este

aspecto del folklore tiene un valor tan grande como el científico, y según la opinión de algunos,

tal vez mayor” [“My theme is the science of folklore and I have tried to explain how and why

folklore is a science, principally a historical science, that today has the same importance as

others and serves as an auxiliary science for others. But folklore also has its artistic component.

This aspect of folklore is as worthy as the scientific one, and according to the opinion of some, is

perhaps of greater worth”] (299). 84 Openly recognizing the non-intellectual influence on

Archivos, Espinosa contends that, in nation-building, artistic purpose is as science, if not in fact

more so. He concludes, in accordance with the “opinion of some,” that “[e]l arte del pueblo

encarna y representa con mayores espesores de realidad el alma de la humanidad, su espíritu de

idealismo y de justicia, el verdadero sendero por donde el alma individual busca el contacto con

la divinidad” [“popular art incarnates and represents with great accuracy the soul of humanity, its

spirit of idealism, and its justice, the true path by which the individual soul searches for the

divine”] (299-300). Thus echoing Ortíz’s rhetoric again, Espinosa transfers the precepts of a

nationalist folklore beyond documentation to encompass artistic craft.

Chacón y Calvo’s “Del folklore cubano” (1930) was yet another reflection that modifies

the Society’s original premise for the purpose of transferring scientific discourse onto art and,

84 He continues, “Y así el folklore bien documentado y estudiado nos revela verdades históricas y

antropológicas de inestimable valor. La mayoría de los cuentos, los cantos, las adivinanzas y

dichos, las oraciones, los conjuros, que hoy en día se pueden recoger en todas partes del mundo,

encierran la historia cultural de todos pueblos” [“And thus well-documented and studied folklore

reveals invaluable historical and anthropological truths to us. The majority of the stories, chants,
riddles and sayings, speeches, conjurations, that nowadays can be found all over the world,

enclose every people’s cultural history”] (299).
specifically, onto literature: “En Cuba, tenemos poca conciencia de nuestro pasado” [“In Cuba, we are not very aware of our past”] (176). Indian, African and Spanish heritages, he contends, ought to inspire folkloric research.

Deben recopilarse, no una, sino varias lecciones de cada tema, y del estudio comparativo de las mismas deducir los atributos esenciales del tema que se investiga. Debe huirse de toda generalización en el comienzo de su estudio…. No es un folklore local ni regional lo que quiere formarse: es un folklore nacional, un folklore cubano. Y este ha de ser un paso decisivo en la formación de una literatura propia. (177-178)

[Not one, but various meanings of each theme should be compiled, and their comparative study to deduce the essential attributes of the theme that is being investigated. All generalizations should be avoided from the beginning of the study…. The goal is not local nor regional folklore: the goal is a national folklore. And that should be a decisive step in the formation of our literature]. (177-178)

Key here was that, as Chacón y Calvo stressed the importance of folklore in the formation of a national literature, his rhetoric did not include racial delimitations. Ever the hispanophile, he exalted the quest for “Cuban” folklore – not black, white, nor aboriginal folklore – as an undertaking that necessarily avoids race, and as such posits Cuba as non-racial, national. Finally, along these same lines, the anonymous contributor “J. del M.” puts forth “El estudio del folklore y su contenido” (1930), his own take on folklore and Cuba’s literary “monument:” “Y, en suma, todos los elementos constitutivos del genio, del saber y del idioma patrios, contenidos en la
tradición oral y en los monumentos escritos, como materias indispensables para el conocimiento y reconstrucción científica de la historia y de la cultura nacionales” [“And, in conclusion, all of the constitutive elements of temperament, of knowledge and national language, contained in the oral tradition and in the written monuments, are as indispensable materials for the awareness and scientific reconstruction of history and national culture”] (174). This rhetoric could not be more in line with the Society’s archival mission: the very “scientific reconstruction of history and national culture” is the premise by which Ortiz and his colleagues in the Folklore Society seek to construct national ideals of nationhood. And Cuba’s “written monuments,” its literature, are a key component of that process. Since the bulk of the contents of Archivos deals with folk scientific scholarship, we propose to analyze the creative works it did publish as an epiphenomenon of that tradition.

Fiction in the Archivos: textualizing oral lore

The advent of fiction in Archivos once again recalls the relationship between scholarship and artistic production. As we have seen, the Folklore Society regularly addressed its scientific mission through the disciplinary reflections that frequented its journal’s issues. The scope of this mission, however, reached well beyond scholarship. As Santí puts it, “La creciente labor antropológica de Ortiz tiene… un impacto inesperado: influye en la vanguardia artística de la época, sobre todo en la creación de un movimiento literario afronegrista…. Lo que se destaca en esta etapa de la trayectoria intelectual de Ortiz, además del nacionalismo cultural, es ese interés paralelo en la crítica política y la gestión cultural” [“Ortiz’s increasingly anthropological work

85 “J. de. M.” is probably Ortiz himself, who was known to write under the pseudonym “Juan del Morro.” Note how Ortiz, in his nationalist proposition, intercalates the most evocative of Cuban national landmarks into his identity.
has an unexpected impact: it influences the artistic avant-garde of the time, above all in the creation of an afronegrista literary movement. What stands this stage of Ortiz’s intellectual trajectory, other than cultural nationalism, is this parallel interest in political critique and in cultural exertion”] (30). Hence, the base of knowledge catalogued by Archivos had an “unexpected” influence on Afrocuban artistic production. This scholarship/lore opposition also bridged “political” and “cultural” ambiits. The advent of Afrocuban fiction in the journal must be considered as a mediation between all three facets of the journal’s reach: politics, lore, and scholarship. Castellanos’ summary of Ortiz’s ideological evolution – generalized as a move from “criminologist” to “ethnographer” – highlights the ideological undercurrents that influenced Ortiz’s involvement in all three arenas: “En los años finales de los Veinte y en la década del Treinta, la obra de Ortiz comienza a reflejar las transformaciones que iban produciéndose en su óptica investigativa y en sus concepciones teóricas. El proceso puede resumirse en una breve fórmula: el penólogo es finalmente sustituido por el etnógrafo” [“At the end of the 1920s and in the 1930s, Ortiz’s work starts to reflect the transformations that came about in his investigative optic and in his theoretical conceptualizations. The process equates to a brief formula: the criminologist is finally substituted by the ethnologist”] (128). This view of Ortiz as an ethnologist, rather than a criminologist, places politics, scholarship, and lore all on the same level and is crucial for any approach to the fictional narrative published in the journal.

Kutzinski also considers Ortiz’s influence on the explosion of Afrocuban cultural forms in both scholarly and political arenas.

Afro-Cubanism or Afro-Antilleanism as a politico-literary practice began to take shape during the Machado regime in the mid-twenties and ended, according to its early commentators, around 1940. Rather than constituting a literary movement
unified by an aesthetic program, Afro-Cubanism can more profitably be seen as a historically specific instance of cubanía. Fernando Ortiz’s term for what he understood as a spiritual condition, cubanía, unlike the more passive national identification expressed by the concept of cubanidad, signifies an active desire to be Cuban, and its various articulations in literature, the arts, and the social sciences were to provide indigenous ideological antidotes to the economic, social, and political crises induced by United States interventionism. (142)

Although Kutzinski goes beyond the chronological scope of Archivos by dealing with literary movements that continue into the 1930s, her concept of cubanía dovetails nicely, albeit in different ways, with our position on the nationalist motivations guiding Ortiz’s direction of Archivos. Just as the tenets of Ortiz’s preface and epilogue in Archivos clearly advocated an “active desire to be Cuban,” the implications of the scholar’s nation-building encyclopedic effort bear “articulations” in Afrocuban artistry, the earliest of which appear in Archivos. Although limited, the journal’s literary channel catalyzed Afrocuba’s creative narratives of the following decade. In this way, narratives in Archivos should be contextualized as agents of initiation, for while their literary innovation was minimal, the sampling of Afrocuban lore compiled in the journal did set the stage for the literature to come. For just as Afrocuban Studies is a work in progress with morphing disciplinary tenets, so too was Afrocuban literature a narrative of process. The Afrocuban works of the 1930s and 1940s – Lydia Cabrera’s Les contes nègres de

86 Kutzinski is referring to “Cubanidad y cubanía,” an article by Ortiz in which the scholar posits a definition of Cuban culture according to the unique “cultural dynamic” on the island: “Pero, ¿cuál es la cultura característica de Cuba? Para saberlo habría que estudiar un intrincadísimo complejo de elementos emocionales, intelectuales y volitivos..., Toda cultura es esencialmente un hecho social..., Toda cultura es dinámica” [“But, which is the characteristic culture of Cuba? In order to know it would be necessary to study a very intricate complex of emotional, intellectual, and willful elements..., Every culture is essentially social...”] (95).
Cuba (1936) and Rómulo Lachatañeré’s ¡Oh, mío Yemayá! (1938), for example – present major stylistic ruptures from the fiction in Archivos, while literature concurrent with Archivos – such as Carpentier’s ¡Ecué-Yamba-O! (1927, 1933) – lacked such insight. And while such differences are indeed important, the determining processes that dictated such changes reveal more of the changing dynamic of Afrocuban cultural production. The evolution of Afrocuban “fiction” from the rudimentary snippets in Archivos to full-fledged generic classification of later Afrocuban fiction corresponds to a rapid solidification of Afrocuban literary expression. Moreover, given the academic and anthropological background of these figures, the importance of the scientific documentation afforded them via the journal becomes more central still.

“Fiction” in Archivos, then, is predictably basic and bears much resonance with Western narrative style. The short pieces include very little Afrocuban linguistic transcription and present little ambiguity in narrative point of view. The authored collections, which, on the other hand, reached canonical status in the 1930s, are ambiguous, supernatural, and fantastic. The presence of African idioms makes them challenging for a Western reader, and by positing characters on abstract, legendary planes, dialogue attains an ambiguous sense of anonymity. Perhaps another definitive point of comparison between the fiction in Archivos and its progeny is one of geography: each story included in the journal takes place in Cuba; geographical location is indistinct in the works of Lachatañeré and Cabrera. In fact, any geographical ambiguity in the fiction included in Archivos is clarified by textual commentary. But before analyzing these fictive works, one more facet of Ortiz’s research methodology merits discussion.

We have already seen the precise language with which Ortiz calls for authenticity in the compilation of Cuban folklore. Such adherence to the spoken word complies, according to Di

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87 See our preliminary discussion of such narrative distinctions in our introduction.
88 Such considerations comprise the heart of our speculations in Chapter Five.
Leo, with one of the overriding methodological precepts of nineteenth- and twentieth-century ethnology and ethnography: the first-person interview.

Después de sus años de formación europea en la antropología criminal, Ortiz pronto se dio cuenta que, para ordenar la historia de Cuba con otro criterio que el oficial y reconocer la transculturación que había tenido lugar en la Isla, debía entrevistar a los ‘negros de nación,’ entender el uso ritual de sus instrumentos musicales, estudiar sus lenguas y develar el secreto de sus sociedades…. La antropología de Ortiz, por medio de la entrevista, recupera la primera persona. La entrevista será por lo tanto el género por excelencia de la literatura afro-románica, que por distintos grados de estilización llega hasta Lydia Cabrera y a la petite histoire que Miguel Barnet gesta con don Esteban Montejo. (47)

[After his years of European formation in criminal anthropology, Ortiz soon realized that, in order to give order to Cuban history via non-official criteria and recognize the transculturation that had taken place on the island, it was necessary to interview the ‘blacks of the nation,’ understand the ritual use of their musical instruments, study their languages, and uncover the secret of their societies…. Ortiz’s anthropology, by way of the interview, recuperates the first-person. The interview will be, thus, the typical genre of Afro-romance literature, which via distinct stylizations can be applied even to Lydia Cabrera and the petite histoire that Miguel Barnet creates with Esteban Montejo]. (47)89

89 Di Leo delineates the practical applications of ethnology and ethnography in the Afro-Latin tradition. He posits that ethnology, or “poligrafía,” was based on on-site observations of anthropologists with their subjects, and functioned as a comparative discipline. Rather than
Di Leo applies this insight to both literary process and anthropological observation in Ortiz’s followers. It is equally applicable to Ortiz’s contemporaries, and it will be particularly useful to my reading of three pieces of Afrocuban fiction that appear in Archivos. The fiction in Archivos must be seen as resultant from these conversations, as fiction meets science – lore meets scholarship – by means of authenticity in the transcript of interviews with Afrocuban subjects. The length, conversational style, and anecdotal nature of these Afrocuban ‘stories’ signal a clear stylistic influence of this research method: the narratives are unquestionably the results of interviews. As Ortiz notes in the introduction to one of the pieces, “Cuentos Afrocubanos” (1929), the fiction was redacted “tal como nos fue referido” [“just as it was told to us”] (104). In fact, it is perhaps the very adherence to the interview that prevents the short texts from attaining literary value. As such, the methodological precepts that determine their documentation also inhibit narrative originality. Hence, the fiction included in Archivos, when compared to its followers in the 1930s, does not seem as authentic. Even though the lore pieces were indeed transcribed during interviews between anthropologists and Afrocuban subjects, as the textual commentaries note, the stylistic rupture of their later fictive counterparts places the earlier fiction studying cultures completely, ethnologists established relations between cultures in the hopes of defining a larger cultural system. The opposing current, ethnology, or “monografía,” involved a complete understanding of individual cultures. Di Leo classifies Ortiz as a “polígrafo,” and from that conceptual position evaluates the literary nature of Ortiz’s anthropology as based upon the definitive source of his work, the first-person interview (13-47).

90 Clifford Geertz’s study (1988) also highlights the literary role of the interview in anthropology.

91 Cabrera’s manipulation of first-person interviews, though, crafts literary masterpieces that situate the reader within a beautifully-attained Afrocuban worldview.
Afrocuban ‘fiction’ narratives are a rarity in Archivos del Folclore Cubano through 1929. But that trend is corrected in the fourth volume with an inclusion of a legendary tale under the simple title “Cuentos afrocubanos” (1929). Ortiz himself presents introductions to the story, followed by the narrative, and then a lengthy commentary; in fact the scholarly material on the literature is more often extensive than the literature itself. After musing about the process of geographical displacements undergone by African slaves on their way to Cuba, Ortiz revisits the idea of a “tesoro folklórico” [“folkloric treasure”], this time construing it as a definitive aspect of Afrocuban culture: “Entre el tesoro folklórico que les era propio debieron de estar necesariamente los cuentos, fábulas, leyendas, rapsodias y cantos que contenían las hazañas de sus antepasados” [“Within the folkloric treasure that was inherent to them should have necessarily existed the stories, fables, legends, rhapsodies and chants that contained the achievements of their ancestors”] (97, my emphasis). Ortiz’s statement admits that the motivation for Archivos, the building of the folk “treasure,” is a phenomenon mastered innately by Afrocubans. In other words, Afrocubans already have access to the very body of lore that the

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92 Once again, recall our discussion of narrative ‘authenticity’ in our introduction along with our textual analyses of such phenomena in Chapter Five.

93 Yet another factor of research methodology affects the successful representation of the lore presented in such conversations with anthropologists. As Jorge and Isabel Castellanos contend, the translation of such interviews, from spoken Africanized Spanish dialectical hybrids to written Spanish, makes the coleccionista’s task all the more daunting: “El empeño por captar la tradición mitológica en toda su pureza se ve afectado por la necesidad de obtenerla mediante [una] serie de traducciones.... El coleccionista ha de traducir esa literatura oral, exótica y hasta críptica a una forma escrita del idioma español, sin traicionar la esencia del mensaje, ni de las modalidades prosódicas.” [“The challenge of capturing mythological tradition purely is affected by the need to obtain it via a series of translations,.... The coleccionista must translate that oral, exotic, and even cryptic literature to a written form in the Spanish language, without betraying the essence of the message, nor of the prosaic modalities”] (98).
journal attempts to register through its documentary zeal in their “inherent” self-transmittal of literary heritage. It is apparent that Ortiz admires Afrocuba’s celebration and familiarity with its own narratives – Afrocuba has already “inherently” matched Ortiz’s folkloric calls in Archivos. Although the idea of the ‘text’ differs in the Afrocuban worldview, the body of folk knowledge inherent to their conceptions of religion and nature, and thus to ritual practices, readily subsumes Afrocubans to Ortiz’s nation-building. And yet, he admits, “los cuentos africanos se ignoran totalmente en Cuba. No sabemos de uno solo que haya sido publicado como tal en nuestra tierra” [“African short stories are completely ignored in Cuba. I don’t know of a single one that has been published as such in our land”] (97). Ortiz’s gesture in this fourth volume of Archivos thus inaugurates Afrocuban “fiction” and legitimizes it as “literature.” By way of his publication, introduction, and commentary, Ortiz thereby launches a new type of artistic discourse from a newly appropriated cultural arena. The nationalist premise is still an undercurrent to the scholar’s work, and his timing predates immediately the explosion of Afrocuban literature – in all genres, not just fiction – that will take place in the 1930s. In fact, the following year (1930), Ortiz will praise the work of Nicolás Guillén’s Motivos de Son for its “social” and “cultural” value in a lengthy review with the same name.94 Rekindling his rhetoric with nationalist exclamations, Ortiz concludes his introduction to the folk text begging for such folkloric documentation to continue. This time, however, he makes specific mention of Afrocuban lore: “Hoy hacemos de nuevo el ruego a los folkloristas de Cuba. ¡Recojamos los cuentos de los niños cubanos! ¡Sobre todo, los cuentos de los negritos!” [“Today we repeat our

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94 See Archivos 5.3 (1930).
request to Cuban folklorists. Compile the stories of Cuban children! Above all, those of the black children!” (99).  

Complying with his own research method, Ortiz documents his source as an interview with “una morena muy vivaracha y de memoria muy lúcida” [“a vivacious dark-skinned woman with an incredible memory”], which took place “just days ago” (99). Ortiz transcribes the tale, “Cuento de ‘Ambeko’ y ‘Aguatí,’” which, in his estimation, is the first of its kind published: “Este es el cuento de Ambeko, que en lengua carabalí quiere decir ‘venado,’ y Aguatí, que es la ‘jicotea’ o tortuga” [“This is the story of Ambeko, which in carabalí means ‘deer,’ and Aguatí, which is the jicotea, or tortoise”] (100). What follows is a short tale dealing with a competition between the two animals, a typical fable easily comparable to other folk traditions (102). The plot, and its predictable outcome, is moralistic in nature and does not offer major literary incisiveness. It is, after all, a fable, a fact Ortiz addresses in his commentary of the text he

95 Folklore on children’s literature is a much-visited theme in Archivos and, in fact, there were regularly recurring pieces dedicated to the topic: “Folklore del niño cubano” [“Folklore of the Cuban Child”] and “Juegos infantiles cubanos” [“Cuban Childrens Games”]. It is interesting to consider how Ortiz, with his interest in child folklore, is seeking to build the folkloric archive from the bottom up, intilling folkloric initiative among the nation’s children.

96 In reference to the age of the Afrocubans interviewed by Ortiz and his disciples, Octavio Di Leo states the following: “En etnografía, la longevidad tiene la virtud de reducir las infinitas versiones y diversiones de la historia oral a los límites de una biografía individual. Es cierto que el entrevistador deberá aún vérselas con otras incógnitas más difíciles de despejar, como la traducción o la autocensura, pero el recurrir a un testigo limita el margen de error que toda transmisión conlleva” [“In ethnography, long life has the virtue of reducing infinite versions and diversions of oral history to the limits of individual biography. It is certain that the interviewer should still see the histories as difficult to uncover, as in translation or revision, but the act of returning to a witness limits the margin of error”] (76-77).

97 Such introductions for the Western reader, typical of the first writings in the Afrocuban tradition, disappear by the later Afrocuban fiction writers, principally in the work of Lydia Cabrera and Rómulo Lachたñeré. As we will see in Chapter 4, the lack of pre-definition in later Afrocuban narratives is the principal vehicle by which texts assume an attractive modernist ambiguity. Ortiz, as an instigator of this tradition, opts for the textbook, or “thesaurus” approach, guiding his reader into the narrative. It is interesting to note, however, the continuation of the fabled narrative from the 1920s to the 1930s and beyond in Afrocuban narratives, to which di Leo coins the phrase “Esopo era mulato” [“Aesop was mulatto”] (62).
classifies as a “folklore de animales” (103). The tale does bear certain innovation, however, in its inclusion of African musical verses in the carabalí language, although later appropriations of Afrocuban fiction will include many more African languages. As the intra-textual notations indicate, phrases such as “Ambeko rimagüé kindandá kore nyáó” and “Aguatí langué, langué, langué” present non-Western, rhythmic chants amidst an otherwise Hispanicized language (100-101). Such inclusions distance the text from canonical, Western conceptions narrative and resonate with later traits of specifically Afrocuban narrative. The regularity of africanisms such as these in the later work of Lachatañeré, Cabrera and even Ramón Guirao evidences a stylistic trend in that body of fiction. Such linguistic practices posit the later narratives on a more legendary plane, not only bringing the ritual and rhythmic nature of Afrocuban languages to the reader’s mind, but also contributing to the sense of spiritual transcendence that governs later manifestations of the genre. In considering the role of Archivos as a vehicle that moves toward such style, we contend that the mere inclusion of non-Hispanic languages in the Archivos text represents an artistic initiative that will in fact influence later fiction. To repeat, this is not to suggest a cause-and-effect scenario. Rather, the matters addressed in Archivos equate to a national dialogue on its own budding ‘Afrocuban’ literature. While Ortiz still implements his cataloging of the cuento through definitions and introductions, the lack of such textual guides in later Afrocuban tales is a definitive mark of their ambiguity, and, consequently, their artistic innovation as pieces of Afrocuban lore.

Another narrative, “La ceiba de Ta-Benino” (1930), explores the Afrocuban thematic without privileging any commentary on its origin or its legendary history. More aptly classifiable as folk legend, it lacks the fable-like nature of the carabalí tale. Whereas the fable involved minimal fantastic elements and a questionable geographic locale, the narrator in the
latter establishes at the outset that his story does take place in Cuba. It involves a “leyenda tenebrosa” [“gloomy legend”] and describes the fetishist rituals of a Catholic priest in Matanzas. Its style is not typical of Afrocuban narrative to follow, and perhaps could best be likened to that of a tradición by Ricardo Palma. Practices in the Afrocuban tradition, involving offerings at a grave under the town’s ceiba, are complemented by other signs of Afrocuban lore: the power of nature exemplified in a hurricane, a mysterious light that emanates from the nationally-significant ceiba tree, an appearance of the devil and “walking dead,” and other superstitions regarding life after death. While the narrator is quick to point out that the mysterious town happenings are easily explainable – for example, he reveals the identity of the person leaving the offerings (the priest), he tells us that the hurricane could not be divine punishment because it was forecast by the town’s weathermen, and he discloses the source of the mysterious light that scares the villagers – he does present a minimal catalog of Afrocuban rituals and thereby represents an arrival of Afrocuban practices as accepted literary technique. His mini-archive fits nicely within the journal’s more sweeping archival purpose. The narrator, in mentioning the “fetichista” (147) practices of the historical protagonist Ta-Benino, notes the town’s response to the Afrocuban figure’s death: “Luego entonces los muertos salían y el camino real empezó a desviarse y se desvió totalmente, a instancias del cura, el pueblo, a las doce de la noche estaba despierto esperando ver ‘la luz del demonio,’ como la llamaba el reverendo padre” [“Then the dead came out and the royal road started to swerve and it turned over completely, and at the priest’s insistence, the town was awake at midnight waiting to see the ‘light of the devil,’ as the reverend father liked to call it”] (148-149). While the inclusion of an Afrocuban character with

98 The tradiciones, compiled by Peruvian Ricardo Palma (1880-1906), were anecdotal costumbrista narratives which often explained the historical origin of a phrase or a custom through moralistic content.
an Afrocuban name in the narrative clearly invokes an Afrocuban thematic, the short tale does not identify the racial heritage of the story’s other characters. In fact, the narrator’s detailing gives the reader the impression that Ta-Benino is the only Afrocuban in town. The text appears to function merely as an outlet for explaining Afrocuban practices in non-threatening ways by way of a relative lack of Afrocuban characters.

In “La Circular 35” (1930), the third-person narrator reveals the protagonist’s race by noting his “piel negra” [“black skin”] (238). The story tells of a black soldier’s afternoon outing in order to prevent “the use of African drums in ritual dances” at a post-harvest festival after reading the “Circular 35,” the circulated pamphlet that discloses the official denouncement of the celebration (238). Through narrative introspection, we learn that while the soldier travels to police the festival, that the character feels in conflict between two worlds: the “memories” of his African ancestral past haunt him in his present military career (240). After observing the festival, he states that “[m]uchas veces él había bailado en aquellas fiestas…. Y pensó mandar al diablo la Circular 35, con todos sus considerandos” [“[h]e had danced in those festivals many times…. And he thought about throwing the ‘Circular 35’ out with all its ‘wherebys’”] (244). The rituals are presented to the reader by way of descriptions by the narrator himself. As the character describes the scene before him, he notes the actions of a negrito: “Un negrito, con el sombrero de paño hasta los ojos, con un clavo, tocaba unas botellas. Y el que tocaba el bongó, sobreponía su ruido al de los otros instrumentos, tocando con vehemencia que llegaba al paroxismo, con los dedos múltiples y el dorso y la palma de las manos” [“A negrito, with a cloth hat over his eyes and a stick in his hand, was playing some bottles. And the one who was playing the bongo played his noise over that of the other instruments, playing with such vehemence that he was bordering on paroxysm, with his many fingers, his back and the palms of
his hands”] (244). While, on the one hand, the character’s narrative introspection reveals his familiarity with such practices and his understanding of them as an Afrocuban himself, descriptors such as “vehemence” and “paroxysm” signal, on the other hand, the character’s disapproval of the celebration. The soldier finally carries out the orders published in the “Circular 35:” “Sacó el machete, rápido, y con la punta desagarró el cuero tenso de los tambores” [“He took out his knife, quickly, and with its point cut open the tense leather of the drums”] (244). He is unsurprised, however, at the story’s conclusion, when he hears that the celebrating sugar mill workers improvise: “Se detuvo escuchando. Entonces por la tonalidad, comprendió que no eran tambores. Seguramente, para sustituirlos, se habían puesto a tocar en cajones vacíos. Se sonrió y encogiéndose de hombros soltó las riendas al caballo, dejándose conducir por su instinto. Y el caballo marchaba como si siguiera el compás de los cajones distantes” [“He waited, listening. Then, by their tone, he understood that they were not drums. Surely, in order to replace them, they had begun playing empty boxes. He smiled, shrugging his shoulders, and let go of the horse’s reins, letting him go by instinct. And the horse marched as if it were following the rhythm of the distant boxes”] (245).

Whereas the previous story was more costumbrista in nature, this story is obviously more of a channel for analyzing Afrocuban social concerns than it is an exposition of Afrocuban culture. There are no African linguistic referents in the text, not even as the soldier converses with Afrocubans at the festival. And, while the narrative is in no way legendary in nature, its thematic is significant as commentary on the place of Afrocuban music and dance immediately preceding times of nationalized expressions of such rituals. As the text demonstrates an act of resistance toward Republican laws which prohibit Afrocuban celebrations (that is, specific hegemonic practices meant to minimize the subaltern’s own self-expressive ability), it is both a
literary means of validating Afrocuban cultural practice and a critique of the legislative practice that inhibits the assimilation of Afrocuban heritage into concepts of national unity and symbolism.

Each of these three texts contains transitive elements that are more soundly established in their generic successors. While their literary merits are few and far between, it is essential to reconsider the context in which they appeared and the purpose they served. As short texts in a journal principally dedicated to academic writing, the narratives readily distinguish themselves from the others in Archivos. Being that the journal so explicitly laid out its purpose and the tenets of its scientific approach to construct a national heritage for 1920s Cuba, these fictional narratives necessarily form part of that cause. As precursor participants in the “Afrocubanophile frenzy,” these texts herald those of the following decade by employing, albeit in an elemental form, a style that will flourish in later Afrocuban fiction.

Conclusion. Exile and beyond

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate how Ortiz’s archival approach to scientific research fashioned a legitimate scholarly arena for Afrocuban studies. It is crucial to identify this stage of scholarship as a transitional one that bridges Ortiz’s entrance into Afrocuban anthropological work and the Afrocuban fads that dominated cultural production in later decades. The advent of a scholarly base of knowledge, realized over the course of Archivos, melded intellectual, political, and popular fronts and became a prominent outlet for nationalism in these years of the Cuban republic. The prominence of Afrocuban subjects in the island’s art surpassed in the 1930s the archival intentions and fashioned cultural representations which could function without connections to scientific research. Although Ortiz continued to be a major
name in later Afrocuban art, particularly fiction, such artistic currents enjoyed outward
independence from the scholarship that was so crucial at their inception. Interestingly enough, as
Afrocuban literature in the 1930s assumed styles that characterized them as non-academic, the
major figures in such fiction were in fact scholars themselves, and many of those to be discussed
in Chapter Five were Ortiz’s disciples.

1930 marks a professional and personal rupture in Ortiz’s life. The Folklore Society and
the Archivos disbanded during the violent last three years of the Machado dictatorship and Ortiz
chose exile in Washington D.C. After his return in 1934, Ortiz reestablished his intellectual
presence but his political activism dwindled. One of the principal figures in Cuban politics since
the founding of the Republic curbed his presence on the political circuit. His major scholarly
enterprises of the following years were to include the foundation of the Sociedad de Estudios
Afrocubanos [Society of Afrocuban Studies], and that organization’s serial publication, Estudios
Afrocubanos [Afrocuban Studies] (1937-1946), as well as the publication of his landmark
Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar [Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar] (1940).
Ideologically speaking, from his return until his death in 1969, Ortiz focused his folkloric
investigation almost exclusively on the Afrocuban thematic. Also during that time, an
abundance of articles on Cuba’s African heritages paved the way for lengthy studies on music,
dance and theater in the early 1950s, while the most central figures in Afrocuban legendary
fiction, Rómulo Lachatañeré and Lydia Cabrera, published their inaugural narratives under

99 Louis A. Pérez notes that Cubans, from 1930-1933, were living the “full effects” of economic
crisis (61). “In November 1930,” he says,” the government proclaimed a state of siege
throughout the island. Army units in full combat dress assumed police functions in provincial
cities and towns.... Repression depended upon an extensive police apparatus: a secret police was
organized – the Sección de Expertos, specialists in the method of torture - while the Partida de la
Porra served as a government death squad. Cuba assumed the appearance of an armed camp
under a regime for which neutrality was suspect and the slightest criticism was subversive” (61-62).

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Ortiz’s supervision. Undoubtedly, the scholarly archives completed by Ortiz in the 1920s set the stage for the advances in Afrocuban studies in the 1930s. Though a short-lived scholarly endeavor among a close circle of like-minded intellectuals, the Archivos del Folklore Cubano plotted a course for later treatises on non-Hispanic culture in Cuba. A retrospective comparison between the national rejection of Afrocuban art forms in the 1910s and the national acceptance of such art as viable cultural expression in the 1930s provides the proof.
Chapter Four, Cataloguing Afrocuba: Writing Mulatto Culture
(1930-1951)

This chapter analyzes disciplinary reflection, ideological pointers, and corrective motivations in Ortiz’s works of the 1930s-1950s. It traces how such texts garner support for Ortiz’s mulatto culture thesis, the ideological rubric which guides his post-exile scholarship. Beginning with *Estudios Afrocubanos* (1937-1946), we will examine the scholarly implications of Ortiz’s solidified ideology with respect to the treatment of Afrocubans and national culture. The underpinnings of the texts in question enrich previous bibliographic enterprises and as a consequence achieve truly archival status – they reveal an Afrocuban scholarly base unequalled elsewhere. As we examine methodological advancements, we must also address the somewhat impalpable concurrent amplification of Ortiz’s scope. Whereas *Los negros brujos* was confined to criminology and legislation, Ortiz’s subsequent work will undertake massive disciplinary augmentations and develop theoretical perspectives on history, economics, politics, anthropology, and ethnography, to name just a few disciplines. Another characteristic of these years is the textual authority Ortiz assumes as a prologuist to prominent Afrocuban fiction. Indeed, such prologues directly manifest of Ortiz’s ideological position, in which artistry and scholarship, linked to Ortiz, signify a murkiness that blurs the boundaries between scholarly discipline and narrative art. Thus, art melds with narrative, and narrative with academic discourse, to craft an aggregate of writing on and from Afrocuba. Not only is Ortiz’s early work notably imprecise in its disciplinary cohesion (recall the multiplicity of theses in *Hampa afrocubana* discussed in Chapter Two). So too, later work, although ideologically sound and put forth as a mechanism for celebrating Afrocuban culture, blurs disciplinary constructs. It could be said, in fact, that Ortiz’s post-exile theories on Cuban race, in their envelopment of spiritually-
and metaphysically-charged rhetoric, could indeed blur such demarcations to a greater degree than during the politically-active Republican years.

Afrocuban scholarship’s most prolific dissemination occurred after Ortiz’s exile in Washington, D.C. Upon his 1934 return, he turned from the heightened political involvement that characterized the preceding decades and redirected his efforts towards scholarship. Later work came to be categorically more research-intensive, less directly political, and embraced contemporaneous Afrocuban themes almost exclusively. In 1959 Ortiz tells how pre-1930 political responsibilities hindered vigorous academic research.

Por entonces tuve ya la malaventura de meterme en política…. [Y]a muy conocido y con cierta popularidad, cada vez que iba por Marianao, Regla, Guanabacoa y por ciertos barrios habaneros en excursión exploradora de cabildos, santerías, plantes, comparsas, claves, bailes, toques y demás núcleos donde sobreviven las ancestrales tradiciones del mundo negro, oía yo alguna nueva y curiosa interpretación de mis persistentes averiguaciones. Un liberal dijo: ‘¡Este doctor es un vivo que quiere halagar a los negros para que le den los votos!’ Un conservador, mulato… añadió: ‘¡Este liberal está haciendo un grave daño en Cuba, despertando las cosas de la esclavitud!’ (1973: 183)

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100 It is hard to discern if Ortiz’s exile was voluntary or not, as the critical body has not come to consensus. Moore, for example, reports that Ortiz “openly condemns Machado’s fraudulent re-election to the presidency, and for that reason is eventually forced to leave the country” (1994: 38). Bronfman, on the other hand, remarks that Ortiz’s exile was indeed “voluntary,” but offered no evidence to support that assertion (192).

101 Moore notes a “growing disenchantment with politics” matching “the conclusion of his term as congressional representative, and his forced exile” (1994: 40).
[In those years I had the misfortune of involving myself in politics…. [A]lready very well known and popular, each time I went through Marianao, Regla, Guanabacoa, and certain Havana neighborhoods in search of cabildos, santerías, plantes, comparsas, claves, bailes, toques, and other nuclei where black ancestral traditions survive, I heard a new, curious interpretation of my persistent investigations. A liberal said: ‘This doctor is a vivo who wants to flatter the blacks to get their votes!’ A conservative… mulatto added: ‘This liberal is causing serious damage in Cuba and is waking the things of slavery!’]. (1973: 183)

Ortiz reveals how political affluence marred Afrocuban research, how stature dwarfed potential scientific effort and rendered true scholarship ineffective. That the diminution of formal political activity afforded a more focused scholarship seems unquestionable: these are the years when Ortiz firmed up Afrocuban studies’ bibliographic bases by refining previous material, imbuing bibliographical gaps, and producing a hefty run of major titles, many of which are still authoritative today. Accordingly, while his initial work is outdated and replete with ideological misgivings, the works between the 1930s and the 1950s point to the scholar’s authoritative voice on Afrocuba and his newly-celebratory approach toward that culture. A host of textual production readily exemplifies such standard: Estudios Afrocubanos [Afrocuban Studies] (1937-1946), Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar [Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar] (1940), El engaño de las razas [The Deceit of the Races] (1946), La africánia de la música folklórica de Cuba [The Africanness of Cuban Folkloric Music] (1950), and Los bailes y el teatro de los negros de Cuba [The Dance and Theater of Blacks in Cuba] (1951).
It would be imprecise, however, to posit that Ortiz’s dislodged political initiatives excluded him from the sway that was afforded the national elite. To start, politician and bibliophile are not mutually exclusive roles, and his transition from the former to the latter was by no means absolute. It is also apparent that the scholar’s unrelenting national aura precluded a divorce from political affairs; regardless of label, Ortiz’s heightened scholarship in these years served a national end just as in years past. The divergence lies in Ortiz’s new role as a concerned intellectual without the pressing constraints of heading up a political party. Whereas Ortiz’s previous work served political frames, his post-1930 production enveloped the nation through celebratory and conciliatory treatises on Cuban culture. Beyond the move from politician to scholar, Ortiz’s fluid ideological progression – which, as Moore reminds us, is conflictingly “ambivalent” – must be considered in conjunction with this post-exile work (1994: 47). The texts cement Ortiz’s ideological transformation and retain what could be dubbed as his ‘final’ ideological stage. No longer treating the Afrocuban facet of national culture as an atavistic setback reminiscent of social problems and cultural conflict and offering fewer positional vacillations than in works of the 1920s, Ortiz cherishes the cubanidad of Africanness and vice-versa. Preceding decades of ideological transformation pave the way for an incorporation of African tradition into Cuban heritage. In fact, by 1939, Ortiz was contending that Cuba’s blacks were the first to understand feelings of cubanía. When measured against the

102 Even if Ortiz adapted his political role after 1934, there is no question that his work continued to exert influence over the course of the Republic in its open treatment of issues of national concern, namely economic reform and social programs. One cannot ignore, for example, the economic and social criticism addressed outright in Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar (1940). The political climate, both international and domestic, surrounding El engaño de las razas (1946) is equally sustainable. It would be imprecise to contend that Ortiz was removed from politics. His celebrity in these years retained clout. It is undeniable, though, that his academic production increased – the length of his studies, the number of studies and speeches he put forth, and their reception as solid criticism, all evidence an academically-fruitful period in his work.
social climate to be discussed shortly, the remarks were revolutionary to polemics on Cuban race.

Los negros debieron sentir, no con más intensidad pero quizás más pronto que los blancos, la emoción y la conciencia de la cubanía. Fueron muy raros los casos de retorno de negros al África…. El negro criollo jamás pensó en ser sino cubano. El blanco poblador, en cambio, aún antes de arribar a Cuba ya pensaba en su regreso. Si vino, fue para regresar rico y quizás ennoblecido por gracia real. ("Cubanidad" 1939: 14)

[Blacks felt Cuban emotion and consciousness, not with more intensity, but perhaps earlier on than whites. The return of blacks to Africa was very rare…. The black Creole never thought of being anything but Cuban. The white settler, on the other hand, was thinking about returning [to Spain] even before his arrival in Cuba. If s/he came, it was only to return rich and perhaps be made noble by royal decree]. ("Cubanidad" 1939: 14)

Aside from a changed position toward Afrocuban national cultural values, this passage reveals deep-seated historical reconsideration that posits white and black Cubans as equally Cuban, equally national, and equally central to national culture.\(^{103}\) By classifying slaves as the first real Cubans, Ortiz went beyond the juridical constraints that bracketed the socio-historical content of texts such as *Los negros esclavos*. It is not even difficult to extract from this excerpt the notion that blacks are indeed more Cuban than whites. The ideological implications here are stunning.

\(^{103}\) As we will see in this chapter and in Chapter Five of this study, the chronological similarities between Ortiz’s contention and nationally-accepted celebrations of Afrocuban culture are more than coincidental. Ortiz’s scholarly authorization of such cultural themes parallels the arrival of Afrocuban artistry at national levels of cultural expression.
The same scholar that had condemned Cuba’s African heritage in 1906 declares, thirty years later, Cuba to be African, and Afrocubans to be the first who best understood that nationality. Key to this ideological shift is both the content of Ortiz’s work and its reception among intellectual circles. For as contemporary hindsight reveals, these texts engendered legitimate space for scholarship on Afrocuba. Ideological ambivalence aside, Ortiz’s scholarship catalyzed a regimen of nationally significant texts that today complete the Afrocuban studies archive and uphold his estimation of cubanidad.

Brief contextualization of post-Machado and pre-revolutionary Cuba is useful, as the period in question boasted momentous events in race relations, social platforms, and political trajectories, all of which incised the immediate Cuban cultural scenario with notions of progress and pluralism amidst decades of insurgency and chaos. Machado’s tyranny notwithstanding, the 1930s were years of intensifying social modernization leading up to the promised liberal social reform of the 1940 Constitution. It is Domínguez’s assessment that, “[a]fter the fall of President Machado [September 1933] and for the next decade and a half, the social and economic structures basic to the Cuban political system did not change a great deal. The level of social mobilization was high but stagnant…. The story of 1933 to 1937 is one of virtually unremitting social and political warfare, but the opponents were fighting over a much shrunken store of goods” (77). A rapid governmental succession was finally ended at the authority of Fulgencio Batista, a figure who rallied the island and “throve in difficult times” such as the 1940s “but not

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104 See our discussion of this notion in the discussion of l’art nègre in Chapter Three.
105 Recently, the intellectual centrality of these figures to the nation has been recapitulated, their works re-celebrated as the building blocks of contemporary Cuban criticism and literature. Moore points out that “[a]s a result of their efforts, Ortiz and other mid-century intellectuals have become powerful national icons to Cubans in recent decades, and have much more influence as symbols to unify a racially and culturally divided nation” (1994: 47).
in [the] prosperous ones” of the 1950s (84). Unrest might have been a frontrunner of these years, but intellectual life and cultural discovery were not absent from the crux of Cuban sociopolitics.

The root of Ortiz’s scholarly concerns rested in aspirations at hammering out a nationally accepted perception of Cuban culture amongst such instability. The 1930s were replete with attempts to come to a definitional consensus on Cuban culture, and key actors in the effort hailed from sundry artistic, intellectual, and political echelons. Unquestionably, the simultaneous advent of the Afro-cubanismo craze complicated matters: world celebrations of African ‘exoticism’ and its national appropriations within Cuba greatly obscured cultural designations. Bronfman offers a first-rate overview of these figures and puts forth equally exceptional readings of the consequences of such milieu. Even as Cubans in the 1930s “both heeded the dangers of fascism and participated in the vogues of primitivism in music, visual art, and literature” (163), the same decade “was also a period in which racialized conflicts erupted with vitriolic force” (164). Thus, the “emergence of Afro-cubanismo, significant as it was, did not necessarily lead to the mitigation of racial tensions. Indeed, in some ways it seems to have heightened them: if some whites responded with mistrust and violence to the presence of blacks in public life, some blacks responded with wariness and criticism of the ascendant ideologies of Afro-cubanismo and mestizaje” (165). With notable concision, de la Fuente surmises that “social warfare, economic depression, and political chaos,” all characteristic of the 1930s, were constituent factors in etching an idealized “Cuban race” (175).

The reinterpretation of Cubanness in the 1920s and 1930s sought to reconcile the perceived social reality of racial plurality with the need to forge a culturally homogeneous, politically stable, and economically prosperous modern nation. As

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106 Urrutia, Guillén, Castellanos, and Ortiz, to name just a few.
the first republic plunged into disarray and political chaos, such needs became ever more pressing – particularly in the face of the growing Americanization of the island and the undisguised interference of the United States in Cuban Affairs.

But *cubanidad* could not be reinvented without dealing with race. (176-177)

We will see precisely how Ortiz’s altered research coincides with this insight. In preliminary terms, though, the need for a scholarly re-envisioning of the Cuban racial construct is more than obvious. Who better than Ortiz to come to the hub of Cuban racial issues with scholarship on the matter? Most insightful is de la Fuente’s focus on the “reinvention” of *cubanidad*, an idea that involves a necessary coming to grips with both Ortiz’s, old and new. A monumental figure in early notions of Cubanness, Ortiz now propagates a new-and-improved *cubanidad*, up to par with the culturally tumultuous 1930s. Fernández Robaina notes: “A pesar de estar la lucha social centralizada en reivindicaciones obreras y de apoyo a las fuerzas que combatían al nazismo, la batalla contra la discriminación continuó desarrollándose, de modo fundamental, al menos legalmente, contemplados por la Constitución de 1940; aunque en la mayoría de los casos, dichos preceptos eran burlados” [“Even though the social fight was centered on worker reivindication and toward support of the forces that were combatting Nazism, the discrimination battle continued developing, fundamentally, at least legally, by way of the 1940 Constitution; Even though most of the time such law was mocked”] (150). Fernández Robaina points to the logistics of domestic and international issues governing the path towards a discrimination-free Cuba. As Ortiz alludes on more than one occasion, the contemporary critic notes the extramural
ideologies that implore international equality – anti-Nazism, anti-Fascism, anti-Semitism, and anti-Communism.\textsuperscript{107}

Amidst these complexities, Ortiz’s work, and its firmed-up ideology, offered a new take on race in Cuba. He effectively availed scholarship to broadcast archival knowledge and new ideology concerning race, racial conflict, and the like. Ortiz was not solely restricted to his \textit{ajiaco} model, which rendered Cuba a mulatto nation built upon the interplay of several racial heritages.\textsuperscript{108} In a gesture that coincides with his position in \textit{El engaño de las razas} (1946), Ortiz opted eventually for the dissolution of racial demarcations. It is worth citing the following 1939 passage at length, especially in light of de la Fuente’s aforementioned remarks.

\begin{quote}
No hay una raza cubana. Y raza pura no hay ninguna. La raza, al fin, no es sino un estado civil firmado por autoridades antropológicas; pero ese estado racial suele ser tan convencional y arbitrario y a veces tan cambiadizo, como lo es el estado civil que adscribe los hombres a tal o cual nacionalidad. La cubanidad para el individuo no está en la sangre, ni en el papel ni en la habitación. La cubanidad es principalmente la peculiar calidad de una cultura, la de Cuba. Dicho en términos corrientes, la cubanidad es condición del alma, es complejo de sentimientos, ideas y actitudes. (\textit{Cubanidad} 1939: 3)
\end{quote}

[There is not a Cuban race; there is no pure race at all. Race, after all, is nothing more than a civil state signed by anthropological authorities. But that racial state tends to be so conventional and arbitrary and at times so evolving, just as the civil

\textsuperscript{107} Consider, for example, \textit{Un cubano en Washington} [\textit{A Cuban in Washington}] (1943) and \textit{El engaño de las razas} (1946), texts in which Ortiz is quite reflective upon the international race issues stemming from mid-century fascist regimes in Europe.

\textsuperscript{108} Recall our discussion of Ortiz’s \textit{ajiaco} [stew] metaphor in Chapter Two.
state that ascribes men to this and that nationality. Cubanness, for the individual, is not in blood, nor is it in paper, nor in habitation. Cubanness is principally the peculiar quality of a culture, that of Cuba. Put in current terms, Cubanness is a condition of the soul; it is a complex of sentiments, ideals, and attitudes."

(“Cubanidad” 1939: 3)

Meditations such as these are nowhere to be found in Brujos, but are commonplace to the scramble, during the 1930s, to define a “Cuban race.” If that first book construed race as officially, socially, and politically static, here Ortiz addressed race with a surprisingly anti-scientific tone, rendering Cubanness subject to a transcendent “condition of the soul,” not to skin color. Ortiz’s contention indicates more than a new perspective on racial constructs, polity, and social reform. Now, the “progress and reform” ideal molds a spiritually-, soulfully-oriented discernment of Cubanness that is contingent not upon biological and pathological Africanization, but rather a mulatto national consciousness. The rhetoric not only articulates Cuba and Cubans in new ways. It actually embodies a new insight on the role of scientific pursuits amidst such racial conceptions. It is staggering to see Ortiz’s brilliant reinsertion of science into the scheme. Somehow, the think-tank manages to lapse into non-scientific rhetoric about Cuban races in order to ease social tension, and then reinserts new-founded – super-archival – scientific ambitions in order to propel Afrocuban studies from local musings to items of world interest. In the following section we are concerned with the implications of this new rhetoric and ideology upon Ortiz’s scholarly enterprise. Undoubtedly, the scholarship put forth on Afrocuba in the

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109 The official cultural ploy for racial harmony and integration is voiced concisely in “Por la integración cubana de blancos y negros” [“On the Cuban Integration of whites and Blacks”] (1942), another text in which Ortiz melds calls for scientific scholarship with metaphysical statements of Cubanness and “the Cuban race.”
Sociedad de Estudios Afrocubanos (1937) confirms the new ideologies on race, the new roles of scientific research, and the new appreciations of Afrocuban culture cognizant of ‘this’ Ortiz.

Towards a gathering place: Estudios Afrocubanos (1937-1946) and the Sociedad de Estudios Afrocubanos

The publication of the Sociedad de Estudios Afrocubanos, Estudios Afrocubanos (1937-1946), got off to a rocky start and met a rockier fate soon enough. It was typified by long pauses in production, including a four-year hiatus between 1941 and 1944, incomplete studies, deficient finances, a relatively significant circle of readers, and a change in the main editorship.110 As Esquenazi-Mayo notes, “[i]t intended to be a quarterly revista,” but that regularity was never achieved and it spent more time in suspension than at press (30). Bibliography reveals that the journal was only published in 1937-1938 (one issue each), 1939-1940 (four issues released in a single volume each year), and 1945-1946 (one combined issue for both years). As Ortiz makes clear, “Este número anual… se publica con notable retraso por razones económicas” [“This annual issue… is published with notable delay for economic reasons”] (1939: 127). Apologies such as these recur in the “Notas y noticias” [“Notes and Notices”] section.111 Apart from

110 The editorship of the journal first held by Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring and then handed to Ortiz (Esquenazi-Mayo 31).
111 In Estudios Afrocubanos 5 (1945-46), Ortiz writes another clarifier, entitled “Reanudamos esta publicación” [“We resume/renew this publication”]. He states the following: “Por varias razones, en 1941 hubo que suspender temporalmente la publicación de la revista Estudios Afrocubanos en su cuarto volumen. Fueron motivos primordiales e invencibles la insuficiencia de recursos económicos y las dificultades creadas a la prensa cubana por la guerra, que ocasionaron restricciones inesperadas en el mercado del papel y en las posibilidades del transporte” [“For various reasons, we had to temporarily suspend the publication of the journal Estudios Afrocubanos in its fourth volume (1941). Primordial and invincible motives – the insufficiency of economic resources and the difficulties created in Cuban presses by the war – caused unexpected restrictions in the paper market and in the possibility of transport”] (1945: 5).
lacking contiguity, the sole dedication to Afrocuban cultural commentary made *Estudios Afrocubanos* pivotal to Afrocuban disciplinary development. Unfortunately, the publication’s intermittence hinders a precise rendering of its contents.\(^\text{112}\)

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\(^{112}\) Here is a rudimentary list of the journal’s titles:

*Estudios Afrocubanos* 1 (1937)
- “La Sociedad de Estudios Afrocubanos”
- “Contra los Racismos”
- “Advertencia, comprensión, y designio”
- “Estatutos de la Sociedad de Estudios Afrocubanos”
- “El emblema de la Sociedad de Estudios Afrocubanos,” Fernando Ortiz
- “La religión en la poesía mulata,” Fernando Ortiz
- “Pushkin, el gran poeta mulato,” José L. Franco
- “Los ‘Spirituals Negro Songs;’ y su acción étnico-social,” Enrique Andreu
- “Cubanidad y mestizaje,” José Antonio Ramos
- “Presencia africana en al música nacional,” Salvador García
- “De cómo y por quiénes se realizaba en Cuba…” Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring
- “El concierto Afrocubano de Gilberto S. Valdés”
- “Las razas ante las leyes y las costumbres”
- “Publicaciones recibidas”
- “Actividades de la Sociedad de Estudios Afrocubanos durante el año 1937”
- “Notas y noticias”

*Estudios Afrocubanos* 2 (1938)
- “El movimiento africanista en la música de arte cubana,” Adolfo Salazar
- “El prejuicio racial en Puerto Rico,” Tomás Blanco
- “Los prejuicios raciales y la integración nacional norteamericana,” Herminio Portell-Vilá
- “Cuentos negros de Cuba: Susundamba,” Lydia Cabrera
- “Ensayo sobre la música cubana,” José L. Vidaurreta
- “La música sagrada de los Yoruba en Cuba,” Fernando Ortiz
- “El negro haitiano ante las leyes y las costumbres de Cuba,” Fernando Ortiz
- “Las razas ante las leyes y las costumbres de Cuba”
- “La muerte de Peñita,” Enrique Andreu
- “Publicaciones recibidas”
- “Notas y noticias”
- “Actividades de la Sociedad de Estudios Afrocubanos durante el año 1938”
- “Miembros de la Sociedad de Estudios Afrocubanos”

*Estudios Afrocubanos* 3 (1939)
- “La cubanidad y los negros,” Fernando Ortiz
- “Presencia negra en la poesía popular cubano del siglo XIX,” Armando Guerra
- “El sistema religioso,…” Rómulo Lachatañeré
- “Brujos o santeros,” Fernando Ortiz
The journal and its society complied with a high-ranking scholarly component of Afrocubanness, a form of inquiry paralleled by numerous Afrocuban artistic explorations during the same years. According to the 1939 member registry – “Miembros de la Sociedad de Estudios Afrocubanos” [“Members of the Society of Afrocuban Studies”] – the Society boasted, in addition to president Ortiz, such figures as Nicolás Guillén (vice president), Emilio Roig de

“La música cubana. Su valor y su sentido humano,” Ángel C. Pinto
“La muerte del maestro Amadeo Roldán”
“Publicaciones recibidas”
“Notas y noticias”
“Miembros de la Sociedad de Estudios Afrocubanos”

Estudios Afrocubanos 4 (1940)
“La literatura negra actual en Cuba…,” José Antonio Fernández de Castro
“Una melodía negra,” Zoila Gálvez
“El sistema religioso…,” Rómulo Lachatañeré
“Murió Lino D’ou,” Gerardo Castellanos G.
“Juan Gilberto Gómez como periodista,” Lino D’ou
“El maestro Alejandro García Caturla,” María Múñoz de Quevedo
“Aspectos del Haití,” Sarah Ysalgué de Massip
“De la ‘samba’ de África a la ‘marinera’ del Perú,” Fernando Romero
“Negros esclavos, pardos libres y negros libres en Uruguay,” Ildefonso Pereda Valdés
“Las razas y las leyes y las costumbres”
“Publicaciones recibidas:” Cuentos negros de Cuba... (La Habana, 1940)

Estudios Afrocubanos 5 (1945-46)
“Reanudamos esta publicación”
“Estudiamos la música afrocubana,” Fernando Ortiz
“La música religiosa de los Yoruba entre los negros cubanos,” Fernando Ortiz
“La clave xilofónica de la música cubana: ensayo etnográfico,” Fernando Ortiz
“La habilidad musical del negro,” Fernando Ortiz
“El aporte africano a la música popular cubana,” Gaspar Agüero y Barreras
“Las comparsas populares…,” Fernando Ortiz, Ramón Vasconcelos y otros
“Las comparsas carnavalescas de La Habana en 1937,” Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring
“Romance de la comparsa,” Julio Ayllón
“La conga,” María Cadilla de Martínez
“La tragedia de un Beethoven Negro,” Enrique Andreu
“El sistema religioso …,” Rómulo Lachatañeré
“Por la integración cubana de blancos y negros,” Fernando Ortiz
“On the relations of whites and blacks,” Concha Romero James [trans.]
“Contra las discriminaciones racistas”
“La fundación del ‘Instituto Internacional de Estudios Afroamericanos’”
Leuchsenring (secretary), Israel Castellanos, Amadeo Roldán, Ramón Guirao, and Rómulo Lachatañeré. Many figures, notably the latter three, made decisive contributions to Afrocuban arts, musics, and scholarship. Their work will be examined in Chapter Five.

Ortiz unveiled the journal with a short article – “El emblema de la Sociedad de Estudios Afrocubanos” [“The Emblem of the Society of Afrocuban Studies”] – in which he reasoned the symbolism behind the Society’s graphic. Much like the drawing used to represent the Folklore Society, this organization’s emblem bears nationally significant representations. Ortiz stated: “Era conveniente un símbolo que… significara la cooperación por igual de las dos razas en una faena común…” [“A symbol that embodied equal cooperation of both races in a common task was desired”] (11). Ideologically noteworthy here is Ortiz’s insistence upon “equal cooperation of both races,” a gesture that privileges no single ethnicity over the other. Thus, after musing briefly Classic Hellenic statue varieties, he disclosed that the logo represented such races “equally” by morphing together two feminine faces, one white, the other “etiólica” [“Ethiopian”] with “labios espesos y protuberantes” [“thick and protruding lips”] (12). With such representation, Ortiz concludes, “fácil es comprender cómo el emblema adoptado por nuestra Sociedad de Estudios Afrocubanos responde alegóricamente, estéticamente y históricamente a la ascendencia de los dos abolengos étnicos cuyo entretejimiento biológico social en Cuba constituye el designio de la nueva asociación intelectual” [“it is easy to understand how the emblem adopted by our Society of Afrocuban Studies responds allegorically, esthetically, and historically to the ascendance of the two ethnic ancestries whose social and biological intertwining in Cuba constitutes the design of the new intellectual association”] (14). Whereas the Sociedad del Folklore Cubano embraced an emblem that symbolized science, knowledge,

113 Despite apparent stereotypes of African physical traits, Ortiz’s tone is innocently straightforward.
and the nation through a racially neutral, aesthetically plain depiction, the *Sociedad de Estudios Afrocubanos* cements its celebration of Afrocuba by uniformly portraying racialheritages through none other than a biracial, idyllically glorified human face. Depicting race – or, depicting Cuban races as beautifully statuesque – is now Ortiz’s central task. In his estimation, such an image correlated “allegorically, esthetically, and historically” to the dual nature of Cuban culture, its refinement and beauty, and the Africanness it seeks to examine.114

Elsewhere in the inaugural issue, Ortiz established the objective of the Society and its serial publication.115

La *Sociedad de Estudios Afrocubanos* ha de continuar la faena de los viejos libertadores, poniendo la ciencia y el arte, la cultura de esta época, a su servicio. El abolicionismo no ha terminado. Debemos proseguir la obra secular que, en una y otra raza, emprendieron los dignos patricios abolicionistas, mientras haya vigente una supeditación social so pretexto de color, de abolengo o de casta, que harto lastiman las subyugaciones económicas para que éstas sean agravadas por falsas categorías y por sus preconceptuaciones mentidas. La ciencia, guía a menudo vacilante pero única de la mente, prueba que… negros y blancos, somos todos iguales. (16)

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114 Di Leo confirms that Ortiz’s selection seeks “para probar la existencia del sincretismo en Cuba” [“to prove the existence of syncretism in Cuba”] (62).
115 This passage is the introduction to “La religión en la poesía mulata” (1937), an inaugural study by Ortiz in *Estudios Afrocubanos*, that upholds the mulatto vision of Cuban culture. Aside from the article’s coagulation with a mulatto, ajiaco vision of Cuban peoples, it is an important bibliographic predecessor of the bedrock musicological texts *La Africanía de la música folklórica de Cuba* (1950) and *Los bailes y el teatro de los negros en Cuba* (1951).
[The Society of Afrocuban Studies should continue the task of the old liberators, putting science and art to the service of contemporary culture. Abolitionism has not ended. We should continue the secular work that the dignified abolitionist fathers started, in both races, while there is a valid social subordination on the pretext of color, heritage, or caste that the economic subjugations damage such that they are damaged by false categories and by their false preconceptions. Science, a frequently vacillating guide but one that is unique to the mind, proves that... blacks and whites, we are all equal.] (16)

Invoking rhetoric that parallels a newer, spiritual delineation of culture and race, Ortiz now returns to the scientific purpose of Afrocuban Studies and likens its initiative to the abolitionist cause that “has not ended.” Ortiz continues with glorified and spiritualized notions of race, and reinserts into them his earlier premise: the value of scientific discovery, analysis, and the healthy effect of such practice as applied to nation-building. If earlier “science” strove to demonstrate white authority over black atavism, now it shows, at once, both an “essence of spirit” and an uncanny, scientifically-sound equality hypothesis.

Arguably, the most important inclusion in the first issue of Estudios Afrocubanos was a long study on santería by French-Haitian anthropologist, pharmacist, teacher, and scholarly disciple of Ortiz, Rómulo Lachatañeré (1909-1951). “El sistema religioso de los Lucumís y otras influencias africanas en Cuba” [“The Religious System of the Lucumí and other African Influences in Cuba”], spanning three volumes of the journal (1939, 1940, 1945-46), bears an authoritative tone and offers a documentary rigor similar to Ortiz’s but with a subtler, less
rhetorically-expressive presentation. For background we turn to Gutiérrez, cites Lachatañeré and notes the following:

Lachatañeré principalmente critica el mal uso de los términos ‘brujería’ y ‘bruxo,’ ya que Ortiz equivocadamente ‘reconoce el término ‘brujería’ para designar las creencias de los afrocubanos, [aplicando] el término de ‘bruxo’ a los sacerdotes de los cultos, vocablos que no sólo han sido aplicados por él, sino por otros estudiosos de la presencia de las religiones negras entre los afroamericanos del Nuevo Mundo, a los cuales hemos de referirnos también al refutar el uso de esta designación, la que, de primera intención diremos que es discriminativa.’ (Lachatañeré in Gutiérrez 23)

[Lachatañeré principally criticizes the bad use of the terms ‘witchcraft’ and ‘witch,’ being that Ortiz ‘erroneously recognizes the term ‘witchcraft’ to designate Afrocuban beliefs, [applying] the term ‘witch’ to the priests of the cult, words that not only have been put to use by him, but also for other students of the presence of black religions among the African-Americans of the New World, to which we should refer also upon refuting the use of this designation, which, to start, we will classify as discriminatory’] (Lachatañeré in Gutiérrez 23).

Lachatañeré’s remarks identify the conceptual problem with Ortiz’s delineation and label such nomenclature as “discriminatory.” As an answer to Ortiz’s misnomer, Lachatañeré states that

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116 Moore notes that Ortiz’s style is often poetic and metaphorical: “For all his praise of science and positivism, a decidedly poetic quality describes much of Ortiz’s writing. His frequent use of metaphorical imagery, subject to a wide gamut of interpretations, contributes one significant factor to the continued acceptance of his publications years after some of the pivotal ideas that gave rise to them have been discredited” (1994: 41). The stylistics governing Lachatañeré’s piece is much more academically dry and straightforward in tone.
“[Lachatañeré] nos da… una sobria y lógica definición del verdadero nombre que él considera debe dársele como correcto al culto establecido en Cuba: ‘santo’” [“Lachatañeré gives us… a sober and logical definition of the true name that, to his mind, should be given as the correct name of the religious culture established in Cuba: ‘santo’”] (24). Lachatañeré’s solution is simple enough: a terminological amendment is necessary to accommodate the contemporary permeation of discourse on Afrocuba to prevent further racist appropriations and cultural divisiveness.

Although Lachatañeré’s text forms part of the canon of santería studies, for coherence’s sake we will direct further discussion toward the short disclaimer – apology? – put forth by Ortiz in the same issue. The article, “Brujos o santeros” [“Witches or Santeros”], purports to be a clear marker of ideological change. Though Ortiz agrees with Lachatañeré in his election of the new term, one observes in his “correction” not a sense of regret or apology, but rather an atypical intellectual dryness. Ortiz plainly points to the circumstances revolving around his use of the

117 Gutiérrez continues: “En esta etapa medieval de los estudios afrocubanos la visión de la realidad se ve perjudicada por una clasificación etnocentrista y arbitraria,… Por ende, en este período, la Santería va a encajar en la sociedad cubana como una subcultura minoritaria, vista con desprecio por la cultura dominante, que percibe a los adeptos de la Santería como incultos y atrasados” [“In this medieval stage of Afrocuban studies the vision of reality is seen as prejudiced by a ethnocentric and arbitrary classification…. As such, during this period, Santería will come to be embraced in Cuban society as a minority subculture, seen with disrespect by the dominating culture, which perceives the precepts of Santería as uncultured and behind the times”] (Gutiérrez 24).

118 Lachatañeré expands upon the article in a very lengthy study, compiled between 1939 and 1946, entitled El sistema religioso de los afrocubanos [The Afrocuban Religious System]. Part of this enterprise is his authoritative catalog of Afrocuban deities, Manual de santería [Santería Manual] (1942). Regarding the debate, Palmié clarifies: “after a well-reasoned attack from his student Rómulo Lachatañeré, [Ortiz] admitted to some of the more obviously problematic aspects of his early work, particularly Los negros brujos – a text that soon after its original publication in 1906 had acquired canonical status within the republican antibrujería campaigns…. Regardless of the fact that Ortiz radically changed his perspective on the matter in the course of his long scholarly career, it was he who put the legally intractable phantom of brujería on the map of a regime of knowledge geared toward constituting the odious racial and cultural other as an object of scientific elimination” (233).
term brujo. “Y tomé y usé adrede el vocablo brujo, precisamente porque era el término
generalmente empleado con sentido genérico para expresar el conjunto de fenómenos sociales
que yo estudiaba en mi libro; fenómenos de consideración confusa y vocablo de sentido confuso.
Precisamente para su dilucidación se había escrito el libro” [“And I took and used the term brujo
[witch] precisely because it was the term generally used, in a generic sense, to express the
grouping of social phenomena that I studied in my book; a confusing term and a confusing
phenomena. I wrote the book precisely for its [the term’s or the phenomena’s?] elucidation”]
(86). But the explicative passage has yet to classify “witch” as derogatory. Rather, Ortiz has
thus far only explained why he wrote Brujos. Ortiz next explains how santería is replacing
brujería because of a better social scenario for blacks: “Actualmente, el mejor trato que van
recibiendo el negro y sus cosas, aparte del aumento general de la cultura que se advierte en Cuba,
hace que la voz santería venga sustituyendo a la palabra brujería; y esto es muy plausible porque
tiende a evitar incomprensiones inexcusables y desvíos indecorosos” [“Nowadays, the better
treatment that blacks are receiving, apart from the general increase of culture that is coming
around in Cuba, is resulting in the replacement of the term brujería with santería. This is
plausible because it tends to avoid inexcusable misunderstandings and crude deviations”] (88).
And yet Ortiz’s observation fails to recognize that he was the Brujo craze’s prime perpetuator.
Thirty years later, Ortiz removed his own name from the “apology” and nonchalantly pointed to
the course of changing terminologies: “de la vida no aceptada como la buena, que era
¡naturalmente! la del grupo social predominante, política y jurídicamente coactivo. Hoy estas
cosas se comprenden más fácilmente, después de cuarenta años de bibliografía africana y ya con
numerosos museos y revistas de afrología, que abarcan los más diversos aspectos de los pueblos
negros” [“of that life not accepted as ‘good,’ that was (naturally!) that of the predominant
politically and juridically active group. Today these things are understood more easily, after forty years of African bibliography and now with numerous museums and periodicals on afrología, that shed light on the most diverse aspects of the black peoples”] (89-90). Ortiz is quick to point out that, after “forty years of African bibliography,” the incorrectness of the term brujo is understood “today.” Far from apologizing, Ortiz even dares to re-quote a passage from Brujos, a text that, by then, was ideologically inferior and politically unacceptable. In the spirit of bibliographic accuracy, Ortiz even closes by pointing to an error made by Lachatañeré and insists upon his own correctness.119

Given the magnitude of his ideological progression, Ortiz’s invocation of Brujos is certainly startling. But the polemic itself is outshone by a major feat that the debate engenders for Afrocuban studies: there now exists a forum in which such disciplinary affairs can be debated. The open discussion that circulated among Cuban intellectuals through the Afrocuban Society signals the creation of an established discipline – one that can be debated, questioned, and openly reworked by its thinkers. Where Archivos del Folklore Cubano sought to guide intellectuals toward concepts of the Cuban nation through consensus, Estudios Afrocubanos clues its readers in on the polemical exchanges that reshaped Afrocuban studies. Bronfman captures the intellectual nature of the society: “In contrast to other groups focussed on social inequalities and political injustices as evidenced in everyday practices, Estudios Afrocubanos carefully avoided the directly political as it turned to descriptions of dense rhythms, eccentric African gods, and linguistic transformations. Although some of its members… were politically

119 Ortiz ends the article with a footnote. “En la última nota de Lachatañeré se dice que el brujo Bocú fue linchado en Matanzas. Esto es un error. Como expuse en mi citado libro de 1906, Bocú fue ajusticiado en garrote por mano del verdugo” [“In Lachatañeré’s last note it says that the witch Bocú was lynched in Matanzas. This is an error. As I made evident in my cited 1906 text [Los negros brujos], Bocú was executed by the hand of the executioner”] (90).
outrspoken in other venues, within the pages of the *Revista* they adhered to an academic, contemplative tone” (211). The Ortiz-Lachatañeré exchange, then, is an intellectual debate that encompassed refining an academic discipline, not a political one that critiqued a particular Cuban institution. Bronfman notes further that the “concern was no longer to modernize the subjects, nor to seize them in order to extinguish them, but to study them as part of a search for authenticity and origins” (213). It is this “search” that motivated *Estudios* and its parent society. As evidenced in the discursive nature of the cited dispute, political reform took a back seat to intellectual discovery.

Aside from the apparent relapse to Brujos, *Estudios Afrocubanos* forged a milestone for Afrocuban scholarship. The journal was an intellectual force to be reckoned with in its dispersal of academic theses on Cuba’s Africanness. While sketchy, bibliography seems to indicate that by 1946 the journal had met its demise. Having fulfilled its task, however, other facets of the Afrocuban scholarship scene atoned for the journal’s short run.

**Endorsing Afrocuban narrative through prologues**

Throughout the late 1930s Ortiz enriched Afrocuban studies by tackling a new role. Complying with an overarching impetus of his post-exile work, prologuing Afrocuban legendary fiction apportions Ortiz with yet another medium for making public his latest concepts of Cubanness. His prefaces achieve a dual function for his mulatto vision: (1) they lend scholarly authority to Afrocuban artistry, and (2) they fuel its rapidly growing popularity by etching yet another expressive outlet for *cubanidad*. To be sure, Ortiz saw the narratives’ diffusion, and his commentary on them, as a prime opportunity for reaching a wide audience, and so availed

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120 This is not to rob *Brujos* of its heightened Republican ground.
himself of prologue space for meditations on Cuban race to local and international readers.¹²¹

Two narrative collections that dominated the budding Afrocuban literary scene are of particular interest, inasmuch as they exemplify different appropriations of the Afrocuban literary machine to Ortiz’s nation-building, folk-appreciating cause. The first, Lachatañeré’s ¡Oh, mío Yemayá! (1938) meticulously coalesced with Ortiz’s vision, and the polymath put forth a detailed prologue essay that addressed such coagulation plainly. The second, Lydia Cabrera’s Cuentos negros de Cuba (1936, 1940), is also of importance to Afrocuba’s cause, though we will see that Cabrera was not so forthright in her academic intentions as was Lachatañeré. We analyze the narratives themselves in the following chapter. Here we will consider the prologues and their portrayal of the spirit of Cuban cultural definition so fervently proposed in Estudios Afrocubanos.

Yemayá consists of twenty-one short pieces, each narrating an episode surrounding an Afrocuban/Yoruba divinity. Supplemented by a vocabulary and a ritual guide, the fabled accounts function as a complete panorama of Afrocuban religious lore. Ortiz’s preamble, “Predisposición del lector” [“The Reader’s Predisposition”], is roughly twenty pages in length and, apart from some definitional parentheses, retains focus on the collection. But Ortiz does not offer much textual analysis. Instead he muses about the collection in general and what its publication means for Afrocuban Studies. His approach is most useful for his appropriation of Yemayá as contemporary Afrocuban cultural artifact, a current piece of the folkloric archivo. He begins the introduction by expressing the white reader’s need (“predisposición”) for the prologue as an indispensable guidebook: “Este libro sería poco inteligible y de aprecio algo difícil, aún

¹²¹ Recall the nature of avant-garde literary and artistic production discussed in Chapter Three. Paris, not Cuba, served as the crux in which African and other ‘exotic’ art forms were subsumed by international trends.
para el mero deleite literario, si el lector no tuviera antes una idea, aún cuando ligerísima, de su origen, de su temario, de sus personajes, de su género, de su pretensión” [“This book would be barely intelligible and scarcely appreciated, even for mere literary pleasure, if the reader did not have a previous idea, even the slightest, of its origin, its thematic, its characters, its genre, and its goal”] (VII). Referencing the non-white narrative mode, Ortiz views his own prologue as such an orientation, positing that advance guidance is a necessary tool for gleaning “literary pleasure” and fully appreciating the work.122 This coupling of academic and literary narratives, what becomes a common trend in works of Afrocuban fictive legend, is a tutorial-of-sorts for one just getting acquainted with Afrocuban literature, as in fact many Cubans were at the time.123

Shortly thereafter, Ortiz spoke to Lachatañeré’s innovation: “ha querido cosechar literatura en un campo hasta ahora abandonado, diríamos que próvido por inquebrantables tabús, el de las religiones africanas supervivientes en Cuba” [“Lachatañeré has tried to formulate a literature in a hitherto abandoned field, provident with unbreakable taboos concerning surviving Afrocuban religions”] (XIV). The recognition of the field as “abandoned” speaks clearly to Ortiz’s disseminative drive. In contrast with the lack of Afrocuban scholarship are the “surviving Afrocuban religions” that shape contemporary Cuban culture and that merit both study and literary appreciation. Ortiz, to repeat, sees his student’s undertaking as praiseworthy in (at least) two ways. First, the work incites a scholarly approximation to Afrocuba. Yemayá’s readers are made privy to fundamentals of Afrocuban religions and can thus come to understand elements of their own cultural makeup. The text re-teaches Afrocuban traditions that are in

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122 Interesting here is that Ortiz makes much effort to familiarize the reader when Lachatañeré has already included, as appendix, a glossary of Afrocuban deities.

123 Of this prologue di Leo adds that Ortiz uses the space to discuss the fable genre. “Es en este prólogo… donde aparece la noción clásica de fábula, una historia con moralet...” [“It is in this prologue... that the classical notion of the fable, that is a story with a moral, appears”] (65).
danger of disappearing from the realm of common knowledge. Second, the compilation of legendary pieces acquaints all Cubans, not only the intellectuals, with the Afrocuban literary mode, and encourages a national appreciation of it. More plainly put, Ortiz sanctions Yemayá for its celebration of the national heritage he seeks to privilege.

Exemplifying his own requests to young folklorists in *Archivos del Folklore Cubano*, Ortiz goes on to laud Lachatañeré for his authentic capturing of the folkloric pieces. “El autor de este manojo de mitologías ha tratado con bastantes fortuna… de presentar algunas narraciones yorubas, tomadas por él ‘del natural’ y escribiéndolas en lenguaje sencillo y asequible al lector corriente, prefiriendo con frecuencia conservar la típica palabra africana, la frase grosera y la metáfora rústica” [“The author of this bunch of mythologies has tried, with much success,… to present Yoruba narratives, taken by him *au naturel* and writing them in simple, accessible language for the common reader, frequently preferring to preserve African words, blunt phrases, and rustic metaphors”] (XIX). While African idiom, syntax, and metaphor are “preserved,” they are also put into words for the white reader in a “simple and accesible language.” His remarks, extolling both the authenticity of Lachatañeré’s representation and his efforts at making it accessible to learners of Afrocuban culture, spotlight the text’s place among Afrocuban standards.

Ortiz concludes by offering a plea for more folkloric literature of this type. The remarks recall the rhetorical strategies employed in *Archivos*: “Este trabajo de Lachataignerais [sic.], ya de suyo muy emocionable, debe ser un estímulo. La fronda por explorar, el folklore del negro, es inmenso y tan vario como profundo por sus cuentos, sus himnos, sus mitos, sus refranes y sus

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124 It is no coincidence that Lachatañeré’s “literary” text is fashioned as a catalog – complete with vocabulary and notes – of Afrocuban deities. As such, the work is principally instructive to those not familiar with the lore of Afrocuban heritage. We will consider these issues fully in the following chapter.
canciones” [“Lachatañeré’s emotive work should be a stimulus. black folklore, a frond to be explored, is immense; it is as varied as it is profound in its stories, hymns, myths, refrains, and songs”] (XXVII). Pitching his discipline to all Cubans, Ortiz calls for Afrocuban folklore to be a touchstone for Cuban culture seekers. Whereas in Archivos the scholar inspired a generic folkloric spirit, now he hones his focus and entails simply Afrocuban folk heritages, the most salient cultural characteristic of his further quest for cubanidad. Even as Ortiz does not guise his estimation of Lachatañeré’s work as integral to the broadcast of Afrocuban appreciation, he reiterates the field’s gaps in the hopes of promoting further narrative; more artifacts for self-perpetuating Afrocuban culture.

Lydia Cabrera did not respond to Ortiz’s call, per se. In truth, she predated it: her original work, Les contes nègres de Cuba (Paris, 1936), captured Ortiz’s interest two years prior to his first literary prologue. Also of extreme importance is that Cabrera made much effort to avoid scholarly connections; she viewed herself as an artist and propagated the tales as self-standing, non-academic fiction. We can only surmise that Ortiz appended the academic stamp of approval to the 1940 text without much collaboration with Cabrera, a claim that Cabrera herself attests to (Hiriart 1978: 73). Cuentos negros de Cuba (1940), like Yemayá, contains several (twenty two) short pieces of legendary fiction. The texts treat another divine Yoruba cast of characters, as well as other figures such as rustic Cubans and the occasional talking animal. As Ortiz does not write the prologue to the initial publication, his concern is not to launch an

125 Montenegro contextualizes Cabrera’s place in Cuban intellectualism and cultural discovery: “Because of her class, her gender, and her colonial and postcolonial upbringing, Cabrera was well suited to participate in the recovery and documentation of key components of Afro-Cuban culture. Such qualities allowed her… [to] establish dialogues with different cultures without silencing the Other’s viewpoint, that is, portray a cultural Other without imposing one’s own views. Thus, to the chorus of national voices Cabrera brought Afro-Cuban inflections, and she was careful to transmit them without altering or disturbing them” (120).
Afrocuban work but rather to reaffirm its value as an Afrocuban standard. Hence, the prologue is notably more concise: instead of a far-reaching reflection on the field of Afrocuban Studies, he provides a short introductory commentary. Aside from the relative dislocation of Cabrera’s fictive collection from mainstream Afrocuban Studies, its brevity could also point to the relative familiarity of Afrocuban literary narrative by this time.\textsuperscript{126} Ortiz echoed his happiness with this work’s bona fide portrayal of an Afrocuban worldview. “Varios de estos cuentos del folklore cubano están aun en su fase africana, apenas contaminada por la aculturación en el ambiente blanco, conservando todavía los rasgos característicos de su original africanía” [“A number of these folkloric stories are still in their African phase, scarcely contaminated by the acculturation of the white environ and still conserving the characteristic traits of their original Africanness”] (1940: 130). While on the one hand Ortiz esteems the work, his words are equally condemning on the other. White culture, for instance, “contaminates” the search for true cubanidad, which must look to its “African phase” for completion. Scrutiny of white cultural dominance gives way to applause for authentic narrative compilations that “are still in their African phase.”

What is more, Ortiz acknowledged the role of “black folklore” in the process of textual formation as he further extolled Cabrera’s work. He rightly recognized the truly collaborative effort of both black subjects and white compiler.\textsuperscript{127} “No hay que olvidar que estos cuentos vienen a las prensas por una colaboración; la del folklore negro con su traductora blanca” [“One must not forget these stories are published by means of a collaboration; that of black folklore and

\textsuperscript{126} Remember Moore’s delineation of the \textit{Afrocubanismo} cultural explosion as an Afrocuban “moment” (1997: 2). It is reasonable to assume, especially with the myriad popular and scholarly contributions to definitions of Cuban culture, that in just two years Afrocuban narrative could have realized a hefty audience, just as rapidly as that audience fizzled by the late 1940s.

\textsuperscript{127} Di Leo’s argument is applicable here. The scholar points to the process of transcription in the forging of Cuban orality, the essence of which lies in the anthropological first-person interview (47).
its white translator”] (130). Though on some levels reneging Cabrera’s authorship, Ortiz also offered praise for the work’s authenticity by classifying her as a “translator.” Author of Afrocuban narratives she is not: Cabrera’s “translations” are the mechanisms whereby lore retains its originality and most effectively conveys cubanidad. And while the phrase’s adjectival drive seems foster a depressing opposition between object and objectifier, Ortiz vied the synthesis as a necessary mediation for the production of truly representative Afrocuban literature, and by extension, mutual cultural understanding among differing components of cubanidad.

Perchance the conclusion best captures his point. “Este libro es un rico aporte a la literatura folklórica de Cuba. Que es blanquinegra, pese a las actitudes negativas que suelen adoptarse por ignorancia inexcusable o por vanidad tan prejuiciosa como ridícula. Son muchos en Cuba los negativistas; pero la verdadera cultura y el positivo progreso están en las afirmaciones de las realidades y no en los reniegos. Todo pueblo que se niega a sí mismo está en trance de suicidio” [“This book is a rich offering to Cuban folkloric literature, which is both black and white, in spite of the negative attitudes that are commonly adopted from inexcusable ignorance or from vanity as prejudicial as it is ridiculous. There are many negativistas in Cuba. But true culture and positive progress lie in realistic affirmations, not in repudiation. Peoples that deny themselves are on the track towards suicide”] (131). It is clear how Ortiz directs his prologue toward direct cultural criticism. His own judgment of the Cuban cultural climate is bleak and reveals frustration with those who are against celebrating Afrocuban culture as national. Moreover, it is clear how he views Cabrera’s compilation as a mender of national culture. The document’s essence communicates mulatto vision. The “rich offering” correlates to
“realistic affirmations” and hence strives to market a Cuban cultural component so often scoffed at by the *negativistas*.

At their core, Ortiz’s prologues correspond to a drive for Cuban cultural definition. The literature he endorses elevates the African – the black side of the Hellenic icon, so to speak – and levels the literary playing field for a coexisting mulatto literature. *El engaño de las razas* (1946) still privileges a new cultural approximation to Cuba, but does not invoke that mulatto vision as such. Ortiz’s theoretical recapitulation instead opts for abolishing the very racial signifiers that Cuba embodies.

De-racialized scholarship in *El engaño de las razas* (1946)

With *El engaño de las razas* (1946), Ortiz crafted years of research, politics, and nation-building into a conciliatory treatise on race.\(^{128}\) Surpassing even the margins of his mulatto

\(^{128}\) I have chosen to forego developed discussion of *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* [Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar] (1940), even though Ortiz’s celebrated literary hallmark has recently regained critical acclaim. Besides various studies from a wide range of disciplines and theoretical perspectives, the book has been reprinted twice each in Spanish and English, and a third Spanish printing (2003) is the text’s first comprehensive critical edition with introduction, annotations, and bibliography. Both the work’s structure and content point to its author’s genius as well as to his complex understanding of Cuba and Afrocuba, economics and history, politics and law. Labyrinthine capitulation shepherds the reader through contemporary reflections on Afrocuba while demonstrating vast refinement of the author’s previous scholarly treatment. It is without doubt a voluminous project – an out-and-out encyclopedic compendium on Afrocuba – capable of spawning scores of critical readings. *Counterpoint* has two principal sections. The first, a preliminary essay bearing the same title, compares and contrasts tobacco and sugar. Through a very extensive series of binary oppositions, Ortiz counterpoints the two products. The second section, a series of “Additional Chapters” – “Capítulos adicionales” – begins with a short exposition on transculturation; what it means, how it compares to other terminologies of cultural interaction, etc. What follows is a hefty series of factually historical chapters that present a wide range of reflections: biological meditations on the structure of tobacco seeds, recapitulations of the sugar harvesting process, historical treatments of Afrocubans revolving around the sugar plantation, economic considerations of the exploitative systems engendered by sugar production, etc. Abiding by the contrapuntal scheme, the interplay between essay and chapters – between snippets on tobacco and pages on sugar (and vice-versa) –
demarcation of *cubanidad*, Ortiz devised *Engaño* in order to eradicate race from Cuban cultural discourse. His hypothesis – that race is an arbitrary construct mechanized to uphold structured exploitations of one or more peoples by a capriciously authorized social/ethnic elite – lent innovative scientific reasoning to the Afrocuban studies’ theoretical bases. Such conceptual reworking seeks to mend Cuba’s racial volatility while inspiring new currents of scholarly acquisition. Ortiz’s premises correspond to an ideological maturity consonant with a solid forty-year career. His straightforward erudite tone conveys nothing less than based reasoning, solid experience, and profuse critical authority.

*Engaño* has been named, with good reason, “el más importante aporte teórico de Ortiz a la lucha por la igualdad racial” [“Ortiz’s most important theoretical contribution to the struggle for racial equality”] (Castellanos 140). This statement not only acknowledges the text’s healing capacity but also its “theoretical contribution” to the discipline. Consider, for example, the overarching descriptive quality channeling Ortiz’s pre-1940 works. *Brujos, Esclavos, Archivos,*

results in a text that can be read in atypical order and can be easily interpreted literarily. *Counterpoint* is bedrock to Afrocuban Studies. Its contributions notwithstanding, however, its lack of outright disciplinary reflection concerning the course of Afrocuban Studies makes our textual analysis unwielding. Of course, conclusions on Afrocuba can be garnered from various ends, though nowhere in the text is the process of research on Afrocuba outlined: there are no instructions for budding scholars, no prefaces on how to read the text for meanings of Cubanness, and less nationalist cries to speak of. For the purposes of our approximation to Ortiz’s developing conceptualization of Cuban culture, *Cuban Counterpoint* is revealing in a handful of ways, although only as orientation to the progress of other texts analyzed. First, the text contains a great deal of polished reflection on the Afrocuban cultural constructs Ortiz delved into during the decade prior to its release. Second, Ortiz’s famed conceptual invention – *transculturación* – sheds much light on his theoretical approach to Cuban culture. Finally, while not curbed to the Afrocuban thematic, *Contrapunteo*’s fame equates to a momentous bibliographical contribution to Afrocuban studies itself. Its Afrocuban intertexts – Saco, Ortiz, etc. – and juridical citations render it an invaluable reference. However, when positioned against an earlier text such as *Los negros esclavos*, the magnitude of disciplinary process undergone between 1916 and 1940 becomes apparent. This is a “completion” of *Esclavos*: it traces Afrocuban history and simultaneously analyzes the present, national (postcolonial) state of Afrocubans and of Afrocuba.
and the like did offer insight, but through a descriptive, encyclopedic, enlightening end. Ortiz embraced in those early years the explanatory enterprise for the presentation of Afrocuban cultural elements. After 1940, however, he sought a theoretical rebasing on race inquiries in order to renovate Afrocuban studies and Cuban polity. Engaño, then, gets to the core of Cuban social matters by revolutionizing approaches to the very constructs that have long sanctioned cultural divisiveness. Ortiz’s typical completeness, though, is not compromised. His bookish approach to this, as in the other works, is intense, and his theoretical musings are certainly developed, well-referenced, and expounded upon.

Whereas at other points in this study cursors of Ortiz’s ideological transformation were perhaps veiled, Engaño’s very groundwork shares that of the culturally-renovating texts of the late 1930s. In fact, it exceeds even those texts that posited that Afrocubans are essentially more Cuban than Hispanic Cubans by scoring through racialized foci. As Castellanos notes, the rendering of race as a superficial construct “prueba cumplidamente que los caracteres somáticos generalmente empleados para las distinciones raciales son siempre superficiales: la pigmentación epidérmica, la forma de la nariz o de los labios, el color y textura del cabello” [“proves that the somatic characters usually employed for racial distinctions are always superficial: epidermal pigmentation, nasal or labial shape, hair texture and color”] (141). Ortiz’s text is revolutionary in its demotion of “somatic characters” that uphold racial differences, features that uphold disunited, black and white notions of cubanidad. Such insight leads Castellanos to the following conclusion: “Este libro… debería ser lectura obligatoria tanto en la Cuba de allá como en la de acá” [“This book… should be mandatory reading in both Cubas, old and new”] (141).

The text’s argument is developed over twelve chapters, a prologue, and several reference tools/indices; structure, content, and style fashion a user-friendly document aimed at nurturing
unmitigated cultural reevaluation. In Engaño Ortiz treats both conceptually elemental notions as well as in-depth estimations of the Cuban cultural scenario; however, the text’s overwhelming majority remains directed towards decontextualized theoretical issues. Throughout, it redefines racial concepts, traces their etymologies, addresses those physical characteristics typically invoked in racial differentiation, and examines methodologies behind racialized hierarchies. Its foremost contribution to Afrocuban studies is, however, Ortiz’s discussion on the spiritual misconceptions about race, a lengthy meditation that leads the author to undermine any and all racial definitions by his concluding question: “¿Hay razas humanas?” [“Are there human races?”] (369). The tremendous novelty of such a question amidst the 1940s Cuban cultural situation cannot be underestimated. We have already seen how racial confrontation, coupled with the imprecision of discourse on Cuban races, girded popular, artistic, literary, and intellectual activities at the time. After the enactment of the 1940 constitution, race and racial reconciliation fronted Cuban politics with even more intensity.129

In the “Author’s Prologue,” Ortiz recognizes this social context: “En estos últimos tiempos se ha recurrido a los más irresponsables artilugios de apariencia científica y a la más absurda distorsiones de los vocablos y los conceptos para proporcionar argumentos de razonabilización a las abusivas políticas.” [“Recently we have fallen back on the most irresponsible artilugios of scientific appearance and the most absurd distortions of words and concepts to supply argumentative reason to political abuses”] (30). Ortiz’s critique not only

129 De la Fuente observes that within Cuba “[r]acism and inequality had always been linked to politics, but under the new order the pursuit of racial equality became a responsibility of the state. The credibility and respectability of governments in the second republic would be measured by their capacity to deliver this and other social goods included in the constitutional text” (212). Outside of Cuba, however, it is also imperative to recognize how science became the vehicle for intensely racialized states. Fascism, anti-semitism, and the like were all too historically recent.
reproaches intellectual and political schools. By condemning “scientific appearance,” he sets the stage for a reworking of the scientific jargon surrounding race. To this he appends a scouring conclusion: “Pero todo ello es puro engaño” [“But it is all pure deceit”] (30). These early remarks seal Engaño’s perhaps overlooked political premise. He further justifies his study by way of a simple statement: race has not received enough scientific scrutiny. “Hasta hace pocos lustros no han sido estudiadas las llamadas razas con rigor científico” [“Race has not been studied, except minimally, with scientific rigor”] (30). By making known the deficient integrity surrounding scientific and political institutions’ treatment of race, Ortiz’s justification for his text appears complete.130

A lengthy passage in the prologue indicates the precision with which Ortiz formulates Engaño. His observation unsurprisingly posits that progress can be assured by infusing racial malady with “scientific criteria.”

Se podrá hablar de razas y racismo con ignorancia o con sapiencia, con comedimiento o con desenfado; pero no se podrá mantener silencio acerca de esos temas tan cadentes. Por eso es muy apremiante que sobre las razas, como se hace sobre las enfermedades, los crímenes y los conflictos económicos, se vayan difundiendo los criterios propuestos por la ciencia; única manera de ir afrontando las desventuras sociales y poderlas reducir…. Los problemas de raza son de gran importancia en América y están llamados a grandes y trágicos episodios. Se ha creado con los siglos un sistema de injusticias sociales, encubiertas con los mitos de las sangres diversas, y es muy improbable que los ídolos de las razas y los

130 See previous note.
holocaustos exigidos por sus cultos puedan ser acabados sin más afrenta ni más crueles sacrificios. (31)

[One can talk of races and racisms with ignorance or wisdom, with condemnation or with calm, but it will not be possible to keep these themes silent. It is thus very pressing that race – just as illness, crime, and economic conflict – continues receiving scientific criteria, the only way to confront social malady and curb it…. ‘Racial problems” are of great importance in America and they are leading to great and tragic episodes. Over the centuries, a system of social injustice has been created, surrounded by myths of diverse bloods, and it is very improbable that racial idols and the holocausts fomented by their supporters, can be ended without more confrontation or cruel sacrifices]. (31)

This excerpt boasts several points of analysis. First, Ortiz recognizes that no matter the estimation of race/racism, science is the only vehicle by which the social problems they generate can be “curbed.” Second, he does not confine his observation solely to Cuba, but rather to America as a whole, pointing to his largely theoretical stance. Finally, it bears recognizing that Ortiz has a heightened awareness of world events preceding Engaño’s publication. In fact, he suggests here that racial prerogatives underlying the concluding war were a forerunning motivation to his inquiries in this text. We suggest, then, that Ortiz’s premise seeks to reconsider race and, by extension, to stamp out racial “holocausts” and other “cruel sacrifices” inspired by racialized polity. He thereby promotes Engaño as a contemporary clarifier of scientific research on race: “Este libro sólo pretende contribuir a clarificar las ideas y las conciencias acerca de las razas, exponiendo las conclusiones de la ciencia contemporánea acerca de las mismas” [“This
book is only concerned with contributing to the clarification of the ideas and the approaches
toward race, exposing contemporary science’s conclusions on them”] (32). *Engaño* seeks to
desengaño, literally, to “undeceive,” racism by shedding light on the arbitrariness of racial
paradigms. The whole of subsequent social commentary and cultural analysis wheedled from the
text uphold this prerogative.

At first glance Ortiz seemingly counteracts his international directive by rehashing
internal racial problems. “Hemos escrito este libro principalmente para nuestros compatriotas,
entre quienes también se debaten razas y racismos. Pero el contenido de todas sus páginas, aun
lo que ellas tuvieren de más exclusivamente cubano, es referible en lo esencial a los demás
pueblos del archipiélago y del continente. Si no por su aplicación directa a ellos, sí, en todo
caso, por manera de enseñaza” [“We have written this book principally for our fellow
compatriots, who have also debated races and racisms. But the content of all of its pages, even
those that are more exclusively Cuban, is essentially applicable to peoples of the Caribbean and
on the Continent, if not for its direct application to them, as a teaching tool”] (32). Ortiz
redirects his thoughts to extra-Cuban race matters and considers how the Cuban scenario can be
a “teaching tool” for the rest of the world. If Ortiz’s proposal of *Engaño* as a teaching tool is not
surprising, his problem-solving approach to Cuba’s cultural ailments is even less so. Over the
course of his career, he seems to offer up his insight in order to slake debates. As *Brujos* was
surrounded by great national contention, so Ortiz again comes to the forefront of national race
issues. What has changed over the years is the ideology behind his thesis. It is baffling how
Ortiz is able to mold texts around such heated issues from oppositional dogmatic backings.

His final preamble speaks to the type of reader to which *Engaño* is directed. “El lector
ilustrado encontrará en las siguientes páginas no pocas noticias, referencias y argumentos por él
ya sabidos y que parecerán ociosos; sin embargo, le rogamos que los excuse por ser este un libro de carácter primordialmente informativo” [“The enlightened reader will not find much new in the following pages, references and arguments that s/he already knows and that will seem lazy; however, we beg him/her to excuse them being that this book is principally of an informative character”] (33). If previous work strove to perpetuate national scholarship by offering a critique of the Cuban intellectual line, *Engaño* boasts no such aim: the text is “informative,” meant for the same learners of Afrocuban culture served by his prologues. What is new here is his innovative alteration of directive: the very extent of his concern is measured by his non-intelligentsia addressees.

El *Engaño de las razas* gains further contextualization if we return to Ortiz’s 1939 *ajiaco* remarks. Seven years earlier, he had disclosed the murkiness of all attempts at dividing Cuban races into those of each ethnic group’s “forefathers.” In this way, the proposition of the later book must be considered as an ideological aspiration that directed his research on Afrocuban culture during the 1930s and 1940s, up to and including the famous *Contrapunteo cubano*:

> Parece fácil clasificar los elementos humanos cruzados en Cuba por sus razas: cobrizos indios, blancos europeos, negros africanos y amarillos asiáticos. Las cuatro grandes razas vulgares se han abrazado, cruzado y recruzado en nuestra tierra en cría de generaciones. Cuba es uno de los pueblos más mezclados, mestizos de todas las progenituras. Y cada una de las llamadas grandes razas, al llegar a Cuba, ya es por sí una inextricable madeja de dispares ancestros. (7)

[It seems easy enough to classify the human elements that crisscross in Cuba by its races: coppery Indians, white Europeans, black Africans and yellow Asians.]
The four great vulgar races have embraced, crossed, and re-crossed in our land over the generations. Cuba is one of the most mixed peoples, everyone a mestizo of many forefathers. And each one of these so-called great races, upon arriving in Cuba, is already in and of itself an inextricable mass of unequal ancestors]. (7)

By 1939, Ortiz had already come to grips with the problematics of a colorful approach to Cuban race. Unmatched ethnic “crisscrosses” have rendered categorization based upon a cultural color spectrum obsolete. A major insight repeatedly alluded to in *Engaño*, the previous meditation is yet further proof of the constant ideological revisions within Ortiz. After *Engaño*, this so-called ‘final’ stage of those ideological makeovers also gave way to stout contributions to musicology, another air of Afrocuban scholarship.

Catalogues of catalogues: Afrocuban theater, dance, and music

The early 1950s were groundbreaking years for research on Afrocuban music, and Ortiz held quite a large scholarly shovel. His comprehensive musical – and as his definitional paradigm reveals, theatrical – catalogues documented Afrocuban instruments, transcribed melodies, retraced ritual dance steps, and logged Afrocuban pantomime. As Castellanos notes, “Por primera vez se analizan a fondo el carácter y la influencia de las diversas músicas sacras afrocubanas…. Se ofrece un examen inicial de sus instrumentos típicos, sobre todo sus innumerables tambores. Se presta aguda atención a los cantos litúrgicos, de los cuales se ofrecen varias transcripciones. Y se incluyen, además, las partituras de numerosos toques lucumíes y ñáñigos” [“For the first time the character and influence of diverse Afrocuban musics are analyzed in-depth…. [Ortiz offers] an initial examination of its typical instruments, above all its innumerable drums. [He pays great attention to the liturgical changes, for which he offers...
various transcriptions. And he includes, moreover, the scores of numerous *lucumí* and *ñáñigo* sets”] (143). It is in this fashion that *Africanía de la música folklórica de Cuba* (1951) and *Los bailes y el teatro de los negros en Cuba* (1951) engender the pioneering standards of Afrocuban musical analysis. But the “pioneer” classification should not mislead: these texts, though revolutionary in their fine-tuned content and exhaustive documentation, still enjoy today the rank of a “standard” work.\(^{131}\)

Recent critical attention to the texts and to Afrocuban musical ritual is substantial enough to preclude much repetition here. In *Nationalizing Blackness*, for example, Moore traces the trajectory of Afrocuban music in painstaking detail, from slavery to the jazzy currents of Afrocuban music in the 1930s and 1940s, from the comic theater to the carnaval *comparsa*. His study is incredibly innovative in its analysis of how musical currents posed a flux of imbrications with myriad cultural phenomena: Moore signals the theoretical developments of the exploitative representations of Afrocuba, the hegemony surrounding black and white cultural representation, and the political motives surrounding the at times ‘acceptable’ proliferation of Afrocuban musical themes. In this way, he ties Afrocuban music and theater to national identity constructions as he considers *Afrocubanismo* as a defining nationalizing moment.

Keeping this bibliography in mind, our intention here is reiterative, and perhaps obvious reiteration at that. *Africanía* and *Bailes*, as cultural encyclopedias that document Afrocuban representation during the 1940s-1950s, were instilled as practical references for Afrocuba. Each volume participated in ongoing celebrations of that heritage as nationally representative. Ortiz’s mode may have been descriptive and archival, but his purpose coincided with a larger contextual

\(^{131}\) Indeed, the bibliographical ventures of these two texts was immense. In 1952, Ortiz publishes *La música afrocubana [Afrocuban Music]*, an all-encompassing study that essentially appended the two works, making their bibliographical might even more noteworthy.
motive. *Africanía* consists of five chapters that conceptualize Afrocuban musical systematics. Ortiz extracts contextualization by lengthy prose descriptions and by citing sources from Las Casas to critical contemporaries. “Ortiz no se limita a una simple labor descriptive e histórica, sino que integra funcionalmente cada instrumento dentro de los complejos musicales, religiosos y sociales a que pertenecen” [“Ortiz does not confine himself to a simple descriptive and historical labor, but rather he functionally integrates each instrument into the musical, religious, and social complexes to which it pertains”] (Castellanos 148).

In the initial chapter he states: “Nuestro propósito con este trabajo es el de iniciar el estudio histórico y etnográfico de la música folklórica de Cuba en cuanto a sus manantiales negros, o sea de la *música afrocubana*, sobre todo de su *historia social*” [“Our purpose with this study is to initiate the historical and ethnographic study of Cuban folkloric music in terms of its black springs, that is Afrocuban music, above all, its social history”] (original emphasis, 1998: 23). Musical in theme and historical in approach, Ortiz is, as always, driven by sharing knowledge on Afrocuban culture for deep-seated social understanding of cultural heritage. His first priority is to debunk simplistic approximations to Cuba’s racial makeup. Upon mentioning Cuba’s four ethnic traditions he quickly clarifies that “Esos apelativos etnológicos no pueden entenderse sino como muy genéricos” [“This ethnological nomenclature must be understood along generic lines”] (1998: 27). Cuba’s complicated racial constitution is made known outright by way of this premise, a paradigm that also premised *Engaño*. Moreover, in crafting a study that traces Cuban music’s “social history,” Ortiz infiltrates *Africanía* with his earlier attempts at discursively reconstructing the nation by providing context for contemporary manifestations of the tradition he advocates as national.
In *Africanía*’s second chapter, Ortiz makes great effort at contextualization, including geographic, disciplinary, and linguistic approaches. “El mismo campo etnográfico de Cuba aun está por estudiar, en lo geográfico, en lo histórico y en lo cultural. El mapa étnico de Cuba está por hacer, las camadas étnicas producidas por las sucesivas inmigraciones durante varios siglos están por describir, la dinámica social de las distintas fluencias culturales está por analizar” [“The ethnographic field still still needs to be studied, geographically, historically, and culturally. The ethnic map of Cuba remains to be finished, the ethnic brood produced by successive immigrations during various centuries remains to be described, and the social dynamic of the distinct cultural fluxes remains to be analyzed”] (1998: 79). In this honing of vision, Ortiz revamps another recurrent treatise in his work. Still calling for Afrocuba’s scientific discovery, *Africanía*’s focused thematic brings about a more focused call. No longer encouraging generic folkloric investigation on Afrocuba, his specificity seeks only the musical heritage. But this specificity should not delude, as Ortiz immediately finds a way to adapt his rhetoric to notions of all-encompassing scientific discovery: “Los vertederos de la música afrocubana, que son los ritos mágicos y religiosos africanos, muchos de ellos supervivientes en Cuba, están totalmente por estudiar y hasta por discernir, porque en cuanto a ellos los viejos historiadores de la música cubana los han eludido completamente” [“The flows of Afrocuban music, magical and religious African rituals, many of them surviving in Cuba, remain to be studied and even understood, because the old historians of Cuban music have avoided them completely”] (1998: 78). Ortiz relates musical studies succinctly along other aspects of Afrocuban culture; in so doing, he evokes more typical calls for understanding Afrocuba. What distinguishes this scholarly call is the insistence upon an essentially de-racialized *cubanidad* construct. “El estudio objetivo, científico y artístico de la música afrocubana requiere ante todo limpieza completa de prejuicios,
así de los racismos misonegristas como de los rutinarismos académicos… Y hasta de los fáciles moralistas, ingenuos o hipocritones, para quienes toda música de negros es un barullo cacofónico” [“The objective, scientific, and objective study of Afrocuban music requires above all a complete lack of prejudices, whether from anti-black racisms or from academic routines,… And even from the simple moralists, ingenuous and hypocritical, for whom all black music is like a cacophonic uproar”] (1998: 83). That the ideology put forth in Engaño impinges on Africanía as well makes a strong case for the national motivations of such “musical” studies.

*Bailes,* too, hinges upon its contextualization. Over the course of its four chapters, Ortiz underscores a substantial disciplinary scope; a major prerogative of the text is its reorientation of the white reader to the fundamental differences of the Afrocuban musical system. Ortiz repeats that Afrocuban music, dance, and theater is communal and dialogic, and functions as a matter of two key concepts: improvisation and polyphony. *Africanía* and *Bailes* reveal that as Ortiz crafts Afrocuban standards, his texts become more analytically precise, though his calls for national Afrocuban investigation continue. Thus, *Africanía* and *Bailes* are both typically descriptive and ideologically innovative: they catalogue Afrocuba while upholding Ortiz’s deracialized vision. Such ideologically-weighted encyclopedias offer informative compendia as they combat prejudice and seek racial mitigation. No longer wavering between constraints of academic research and polity, Ortiz crafts his final works into standards of Afrocuban studies via his ever-increasing documentary zeal for the sake of Afrocuban scholarship’s perpetuation.

**Conclusion**
As a means of concluding our discussion of Fernando Ortiz, we turn to a 1955 passage, another portion of which was cited in Chapter Two of this study.

Hoy día ya la confianza en las investigaciones etnográficas va creciendo y existe en Cuba una minoría escogida, consciente, capacitada y con visión clara hacia lo futuro… la cual comprende que la única vía de la liberación contra todos los prejuicios está en el conocimiento de las realidades, sin pasiones ni recelos; basado en la investigación científica y en la apreciación positiva de los hechos y las circunstancias. (1959: 185)

[Already today, confidence in ethnographic investigations continues to increase and there exists in Cuba a chosen minority, conscious, capable, and with a clear vision toward the future… which comprehends that the only path toward the liberation from all prejudice lies in the understanding of reality, without passion and without suspicion; based upon scientific investigation and upon the positive appreciation of matters and circumstances]. (1959: 185)

At his career’s close, Ortiz seemed at ease with the present and future of Cuban ethnography. While still limited to a “chosen minority,” he felt that the Cuban ethnographer was apt at steering ethnography. Analogous to his de-racialized vision of cubanidad, he still clamored for the elimination of prejudice. More precisely, the road to a prejudice-free Cuba must travel the way of science, as science delivers Cuba of “passion” and “suspicion” and ushers in true cultural discovery. We have attempted to show precisely how this scientific penchant has directed Ortiz’s cultural conceptualization. From Brujos to Engaño, while ideological frameworks and political initiatives were dissimilar, scholarly motivation did remain constant: science is the most
powerful tool by which the Republic can understand the heritages it encompasses. Over the course of his work, Ortiz facilitated the scientific etching of national culture that incorporates the African. His fifty-year stint with Afrocuban studies allotted the discipline momentum and trajectory: he got it going, changed its course, and nurtured branches of inquiry and artistic exploration that thrust Afrocuban ethnography onto other arenas.

Our next chapter is concerned with Afrocuban narrative and verse, its scientific and non-scientific observational approaches to Afrocuba, and how such artistry depicts Cuba’s African heritage by nationalizing conceptions of *afrocubanidad*. While many of the works examined evoke clear connections with the principles undergirding Ortiz’s folkloric exploration, some go about portraying Afrocuba differently. Whichever the mechanism and whatever its success, each made substantial contributions to Ortiz’s mulatto revisioning of Cuba.
Chapter Five, Approaching Afrocuban Art

“lo afrocubano… debe conservar su carácter.”

[“the Afrocuban… should preserve its character.”]

–Fernando Ortiz, “Motivos de son,’ por Nicolás Guíllén” (Archivos del Folklore Cubano 5.3 [1930]: 230).

“Nuestra poesía afrocriolla es un eco de la moda negra europea: consecuencia más que iniciativa propia.”

[“Our Afro-Creole poetry is an echo of European black fashion; it is a result more than a purpose.”]


“Será necesario insistir en que ‘poesía blanca’ y ‘poesía negra’ son términos sospechosamente limitadores que cortan a veces, hiriéndolo, el cuerpo viviente de la poesía que en definitiva, es una.”

[“We must insist that ‘white poetry’ and ‘black poetry’ are suspect, limiting terms that sometimes cut through, wounding the living body of poetry that, without doubt, is a single one.”]

–Emilio Ballagas, Mapa de la poesía negra americana, 1946 (9).

“[P]rocúr el deliberadamente no leer a los antropólogos. Sentí miedo de ser influída por los especialistas, de tratar de ver o encontrar cosas que no estaban en los documentos vivos de la isla que eran nuestros negros.”

[“I went out of my way not to read the anthropologists. I was afraid of being influenced by specialists, of trying to see or find things that were not in the island’s living documents: our blacks.”]

–Lydia Cabrera (in Hiriart 1978: 74).
If mapping out Ortiz’s trajectory at the helm of Afrocuban Studies involved tenuous contradictions and at times ideological discrepancies, tracing artistic literature on and from Afrocuba follows suit. The complex of genres, authors, and themes akin to Afrocuban literature makes even the most elementary simplification unhelpful, for classification attempts are fogged by the imprecision that permeates the Afrocuban scenario. Such fogginess spawns questions that shake any notion of Afrocuban literature at its core. Perhaps the greatest imprecision of all is “Afrocuba” itself, a fluid construct that beckons fundamental inquiries. Is it a place? A feeling? A heritage? Is it new or old? Imprecision surrounding Afrocuba understandably makes coming to terms with Afrocuban literature equally futile. Recall, for example, the line of questioning in our introduction: What exactly are Afrocuban literary texts? Are they fiction? Legend? Scholarship? Art? Mimesis of oral lore? A combination thereof? From what perspective are they hewn: Africa, Cuba, or Afrocuba? Who reads them? Africans, Cubans, or Afrocubans? Unsurprisingly, venturing answers only fuels Afrocuba’s uncertainty.

When scanning the panorama of Afrocuba’s literary actors, another fundamental idiosyncrasy becomes clear, perchance the most quintessential manifestation of Afrocuba’s elusiveness. Aside from a very select few, Afrocuban literati were not blacks or mulattoes but rather white academics and artists involved in practicing non-African literary styles, academic treatises, and politics. Indeed, for many, the stay in Afrocuba is short; a temporary literary inspiration. Thus, the ‘Afrocuban’ artistic delineation entails a multiplicity of ethnicities, artistic backgrounds, academic preparations and nationalist innuendos that amass in an ever-imprecise, relentlessly contradictory categorization: Afrocuba.

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We have seen how, in scientific circles, the identification of an Afrocuban culture per se was pursued as a method of nation-building and national reconciliation. Scientific discourse piloted by Ortiz and company sought to define Afrocuba as the most essential of national issues. In previous chapters, we have considered the wavering, contradictory, and even paradoxical premises that Afrocuban research embraced over its contemporary course. What unified each of its facets, though, was the scholarship’s intimate connectedness with the place of the African in the Cuban nation. No matter how prejudiced (e.g. *Los negros brujos*) or spiritual (e.g. *El engaño de las razas*), academic treatments of Afrocuba evoked national issues and can thus be grouped by, if nothing else, that sole overarching theme. Undoubtedly, a portion of Afrocuban literature purported to embrace the same national end and even sought to model academic precepts. Equally certain, however, is that another portion of Afrocuban fictional narrative, poetic verse, and essay was fashioned as literature, that is, artistic writing that sought no such blatant nationalist goal; instead, it was aimed at achieving aesthetic beauty, narrative mastery, lyrical evocation, argumentative incisiveness, etc. In this way, some facets of Afrocuban literature are compatible with scholarly treatises (a few literary pieces even boast scholarly counterparts that seem to hammer down their research nexus) while some artists cringed at any connection with “scholarship.” This type of opposition – scholarly versus artistic literature – embodies the unremitting contradictions surrounding Afrocuban literature. Over the course of this chapter, we will examine several examples from both instances in the hope of highlighting the precarious and perhaps impossible enterprise of delineating Afrocuban literature and its wavering connections with Afrocuban scholarship. Any approach to Afrocuban literature must acknowledge its messiness outright, and in so doing concede that approaching the Afrocuban literary corpus poses an incredible challenge.
Another key opposition amidst the Afrocuban milieu is best understood in terms of *position*, that is to say, the referential angle from which literary figures approach Afrocuba. Two positions can thus be construed: on (outside) and from (inside). The trajectory of scientific approaches among national academics – that is, writing on Afrocuba – subsumed the under-riding sociopolitical factors that plotted Cuba’s twentieth-century course. It is unquestionable, for example, that Fernando Ortiz’s writings were inextricably tied to nationhood, national ideals, and revisionary political motives, all issues that responded to the state of the Republic. Afrocuban literature, or writing supposedly *from* Afrocuba, had the artistic privilege of standing alone, of existing as art, not as a national scheme for racial integration, diminishing racism, or capturing contemporary issues. We have stated above that just as some Afrocuban literary figures undertook scientific, and as a consequence, scholarly issues of national impact, others projected their art against purely aesthetic rubrics. Still others landed somewhere between the two. This chapter makes no aim at reconciling these arenas, for in no way was the Afrocuban “literary school” – or for that matter, the scientific one – polar. That there existed polar extremes – scientific/artistic; from/on; outside/inside; nationalist/non-nationalist – is unquestionable. Yet the placement of so many figures someplace between attests to Afrocuban literature’s inherent contradictions. Instead of a polar model, it might be best to think of how the figures of Afrocuban literature can be arranged along spectral loci between artistic/literary and academic/scientific poles. The advantage of this perspective lies in its structuring a fundamental repercussion of Afrocuba’s disciplinary ambiguity: its figures rarely rest in the same position.

Such hurdles make our purpose speculative. By examining nationalist art, non-nationalist art, and the vast array of work therein, we seek only to point to the issues that encircle Afrocuba’s literary treatments. Indeed, many attempts at Africanizing Cuba’s written art stem from openly
non-African arenas, artistic/literary positions that do not even ponder a ‘national value’ of the African within cubanidad, but rather embrace the thematic in conjunction with stylistic and aesthetic trends. Whichever the case, given the myriad approaches to Afrocuba, it should not be surprising that there existed such non-conformity on its artistic representation.

It would be foolish, however, to contend that academic research on Afrocuba did not affect Afrocuban literature. Scholarship posed a challenge to some writers, an inspiration to others, and a stigma to others still. But the advent of parallel discourses on Afrocuba and its reception among audiences – audiences that most certainly overlapped – provided opportunity for interplay. Our concern here is to address such links, to point to their cohesion and divergence, and thus to attempt to order this facet of Afrocuban discourse in the process. Earlier, our outline of Afrocuba’s discursive formation offered insight into the academic tenets of Republican nation-building; now, our scrutiny of points of contact between Afrocuban scholarly writing and artistic literature will try to complete the picture. As a speculative venture, our considerations here can be in no way exhaustive: ours is merely a sampling of some of the salient connections with Afrocuban Studies. Indeed, given the definitional issues regarding Afrocuban Studies and literature, it would be unrealistic to propose any totalizing order. Before turning to specific pieces of Afrocuban narrative, verse, and essay, however, it is important to revisit first post-slavery Africanized arts.

Situating Afrocuban literature amidst the racialized nation

When did Afrocuba (and, by extension, its literature) begin? The problems attendant to answering such a question should be evident. If Afrocuban literary expression is based solely upon literature on Cuba’s Africans, then our analysis could revert to the nineteenth century and
beyond; to such figures as Manzano, *Plácido*, Villaverde, Del Monte, and Morúa Delgado. Is their literature “Afrocuban?” Given the Republican context surrounding Afrocuban literature and its stylistic ruptures from nineteenth-century convention, it would seem that such a connection would be, at best, strained. Moreover, the themes and political backdrop of twentieth-century literature on Cuba’s Africans were markedly different, as the colonial context of the preceding works encouraged representations of African peoples, in large part, on behalf of the eradication of slavery and consciousness regarding social problems redolent of Cuba’s colonial African slaves. Take, for example, Villaverde’s *Cecila Valdés* (1839, 1882), a prime example of the prior, non-Republican, portrayal of Afrocubans in both theme and style. Afrocuban characters, themes and customs dot the novel; its narrative style conforms, as is to be expected, to nineteenth-century novelistic precepts. Thematically, the Afrocuban is addressed through its most sustainable colonial symptom – slavery – and the result is a text that posits largely social concerns. *Cecilia Valdés* embraces a realism and naturalism that disassociates it from the avant-garde underpinnings of twentieth-century Afrocuban literature. No matter the political frame or the differing social status of Cuba’s Africans, both contexts present literature that resonates with national black issues.

Though social concerns were not out of the realm of possibility in Afrocuban literature of the 1920-1940 period, Afrocuban artistic currents are unavoidably linked to international art, and thereby addressed so-called “social” concerns by means of different tactics, most often with great subtlety, if at all. Consider Ramón Guirao’s remarks, which served as a preface to this

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133 González Echevarría (1977) and Shaw (1985) offer, as we shall see, excellent readings of this shift in reference to Carpentier, Afrocuba’s first novelist.

134 Indeed, in many cases the Republican, let alone the Cuban, was not even emphasized. Consider, for example, narratives by Cabrera and Lachatañeré in which the narrative’s geographic frame is not even identified as Cuba but rather as an unidentifiable natural plane.
chapter: “Nuestra poesía afrocriolla es un eco de la moda negra europea: consecuencia más que iniciativa propia” [“Our Afro-Creole poetry is an echo of black European fashion; a consequence more than an initiation”] (1970: XXII). Diminished social posturing aside, if Republican Afrocuban arts merely “echo” the European artistic milieu, why then did key anthologists of Afrocuban verse include a poet like Manzano in their anthologies? Though such a statement strains any return to non-European “fashion,” Afrocuban literary scholars did include such antecedentes folklóricos – “folk antecedents,” as Guirao calls them (1970: XXV) – in the hope of forging an Afrocuban canon. Note how, in this 1938 excerpt, Guirao justifies including Manzano in his Afrocuban poetic anthology because the poet is “forgotten today.”

Creemos oportuno justificar la inclusión del poeta Juan Francisco Manzano, que aparece al frente de esta antología de la poesía afrocubana, aunque difiere sustancialmente de su forma habitual de expresión. Olvidado hoy,… Manzano es la figura más representativa de los poetas negros y mestizos de la época esclavista de Cuba

[We find it timely to justify including of Juan Francisco Manzano, the poet who appears at the head of this anthology of Afrocuban poetry, even though he differs substantially from its typical expressive form. Forgotten today,… Manzano is the most representative figure of the black and mestizo poets of Cuba’s slave period] (XXV).

Guirao’s contextual move echoes Ortiz’s bibliographic tendencies in Archivos and Esclavos; it should in fact be considered an overlap between scholarship and art, though not necessarily a driving force in the composition of such works and anthologies. Some works of Afrocuban
narrative and verse are supplemented by veritable research compendia that seem to make the scholarship connections unmistakable. Others, however, leave their work as self-standing art and disassociate with such vocabularies, glossaries, and explanations. The inclusion of such “folkloric antecedents” substantiated the documentary mechanism by forging an all-inclusive literary canon that underscored the intensely bibliographic mindset inherent to Afrocuba’s bibliophiles. In participating in Afrocuban arts, they invoked the archival machine of Afrocuban Studies, canonizing African predecessors in the process. Many Afrocuban poetic anthologies encased Afrocuban poetics within the bibliographic archival ideal and, as a result, intersected with scholarship. Even though the texts they included by “folk antecedents” as Manzano and Plácido were not “Afrocuban,” in the strict Republican sense of the word, the canonizing force of such African voices was formidable and lended itself to the mainstreaming of Afrocuban artistic expression. With a heftier literary history to boast of, the anthologists’ compilations gained an authority reminiscent of an established literary tradition. It is important to reiterate, as the Cecilia Valdés connection signals, that Guirao’s canon-formation does not evoke the social issues inherent to pre-Republic literary treatments of Cuba’s Africans. His reasoning, as demonstrated here, is artistic: he does not mention Manzano’s social position as a voicing mechanism for Cuba’s slaves and instead adjusts to aesthetic commentary.

A host of studies on afrocubanismo have rightly noted the movement’s close relationship to twentieth-century artistic vogue. Perhaps one of Afrocuban narrative’s most identifiable simplifications, especially regarding narrative, is that of its connectedness with the avant-garde. Alejo Carpentier, for example, proclaimed Surrealism to be one of his principal motivations (Conferencias 1987: 9-31; Tientos 1987: 66), and Lydia Cabrera’s own exposure to Parisian “primitivism” (which, if we recall, actually honed her desire to portray Afrocuba artistically) is
well known (Hiriart 1978: 74; 1980: 23). But the scientific and social contexts we have traced in preceding chapters demonstrate that Afrocuban issues were far too prominent in the national horizon to reduce Afrocuban literary texts to self-standing avant-garde artifacts. Recalling our own considerations in preceding chapters, Moore acknowledges the racial and cultural processes formative to afrocubanismo: “The mulatto nation metaphor refers to a physical process – the racial mixing of Caucasians, Africans, and indigenous peoples over the centuries – but, more important, a cultural one involving the fusion of once distant systems of language, religion, artistic forms, and other expression into a unique composite” (1997: 2). National race issues were indeed close to artistic afrocubanismo, whether or not its proponents wanted to sustain correlation to such ‘outside’ forces. Regardless of the potential vanguardia label, the African was at the center of all Cuban national polemics in the early twentieth century.

Ortiz himself made a timely recognition to that effect: his coinage of transculturación was an insight that readily grasped the interplay of underlying cultural mixing processes and international art and thereby acknowledged their inseparability.135 Their intended separation, however emphasized by sundry proponents, was hewn within a racialized national scenario that bound the two into a discursive collective. This is not to say that the research connection was easily etched, or that it always took shape via a cause-and-effect relationship. It should be clear by this point that lucid connections are hard to come by when dealing with Afrocuba. González Echevarría himself reminds us that Ortiz’s “early works represent in tone and philosophical orientation everything the vanguardia rejected: positivism, rationalism, progress as defined by

135 González Echevarría’s recognition of the fundamental questions inherent to Ortiz is useful here. “Although not literary in the conventional sense, the texts produced by [Fernando Ortiz] are inscribed in Cuban literary tradition, for they provide the first significant approaches to the questions, Who were the blacks? What was their culture like? What role did their culture play in Cuban society? [Ortiz’s] presence in Carpentier’s work, as shall be seen, is polemical but crucial” (44).
the ideals of the republic” (49). Science and art appear irreconcilable, and a telling index of such a disjuncture was Lydia Cabrera, whose own approach to Afrocuban literary art provides a handy glimpse at the Afrocuban artists to come. Though an air of fundamental ambivalence surrounded Cabrera’s texts, their format, style, and content proved even more elusive. She herself claimed to have avoided a strictly academic gaze as she constructed her so-called cuentos. Whether or not these cuentos were fiction, Cabrera speaks to the Afrocuban paradox at work, for Cabrera herself, after writing cuentos, went on to offer many contributions to Afrocuban scholarship. Indeed, Cabrera’s later scientific research possessed many of the same “elusive” qualities. Cabrera’s rationale, at least publicly, appears to have rested upon her desire to separate art and science in composing fiction: “[P]rocuré deliberadamente no leer a los antropólogos. Sentí miedo de ser influída por los especialistas, de tratar de ver o encontrar cosas que no estaban en los documentos vivos de la isla que eran nuestros negros.” [“I went out of my way not to read the anthropologists. I was afraid of being influenced by specialists, of trying to see or find things that were not in the island’s living documents; our blacks.”] (Cabrera in Hiriart 1978: 74). Out of context, such remarks give the impression that Cabrera did not participate in academic scientific readings of Afrocuba, which as we know was not the case. In line with Afrocuba’s paradoxes, Cabrera is perhaps the Afrocuban fiction writer who disavowed most a strictly academic connection, only to make later sizable scholarly contributions to the field. During her “fiction” stage, however, the distance separating scholarship and art was formidable enough that Ortiz appended an academic seal of approval with neither her knowledge nor consent (“Publicaciones recibidas,” Estudios Afrocubanos 4 [1940]; examined in Chapter Four; Hiriart

136 Cuentos negros de Cuba (1940); Por qué... (1947).
1978: 73). Indeed, the father of Afrocuban ethnography subsumed Cabrera’s *Cuentos* to his mulatto nation, transculturative cause.

Para nosotros sería preferible [observar]… una moralidad distinta y unas valoraciones sociales diversas, impuestas a la conciencia de los negros africanos por sus circunstancias, diferentes de las de los blancos, tocante a sus condiciones económicas, políticas y culturales, así en la estable y ancesstral sociedad de su oriundez como en esta, americana, advenediza y transitoria. Quizá bastaría imaginar a los negros de África, cuya alma se refleja en estos cuentos, en un nivel algo semejante al arcaico mundo de Grecia, de Etruria o de Roma, para obtener una aproximación analógica, en cuanto a las bases de su mitología y de su sistema social. (Cabrera 2002: 8)

[We would prefer to observe a distinct morality and some diverse social valorizations, imposed upon the conscience of the black Africans by their circumstances – different from the whites – with regard to their economic, political, and cultural conditions, in both the stable and ancestral society of their origin and this American society, which is foreign and transitory. Perhaps it would be worth imagining the African blacks, whose soul is reflected in these tales, on a plane similar to the archaic world of Greece, Etruria, or Rome, in order to obtain an analogical approximation, in terms of the structure of their mythology and social systems.] (Cabrera 2002: 8)

The inclusion of such a comment could suggest that Cabrera was a tried and true member of the Ortizian “mulatto nation” school that included such figures as Lachatañeré and Guirao. In
addition, when Ortiz, later in this same passage, employs the *blanquinegra* delineation (Cabrera 2002: 10; discussed in Chapter Four), the fissure becomes even more palpable: we deem that Cabrera’s fiction was certainly more *negra* than *blanquinegra*. We find it difficult to sustain such a label based upon the fact that Cabrera’s “fiction” portrays the African – that is, *lo negro* – in a non-Cuban context without the standard textual aides that facilitate the transformation of African legend into nationally-representative Afrocuban literature. No matter the label, Cabrera’s grasp of the Afrocuban thematic necessarily participates in national race treatises; writing Afrocuban fiction from the pinnacle of post-Machado *afrocubanismo* fuels such a grouping. It is also intriguing to consider the vast body of ethnographic work, which she called “poetry,” that Cabrera authored along these same lines (79). Though Cabrera may have begun her literary career separating from Afrocuban Studies, her later work upholds research ideals intently, even as she described such academic writing as artistic, as “poetry.” In and of herself, Cabrera exemplifies Afrocuba’s inherent contradictions at every turn: she captures Afrocuba’s discursive poles – the competing poles of art and science – and, in the process, the expected dissonance of Afrocuba’s actors.

The figures we examine in the following sections exemplify, to varying degrees, this same textual, ideological, and representational flexibility, a foundational stigma that inhibits any notion of Afrocuban artistic cohesion. Afrocuba, and its artistic representations, is a polyphony in which its actors situate themselves along spectral loci between the host of binarisms we have introduced: art/science, Western/African, black/white.
Afrocuban narrative: Between Science and Fiction

Between 1933 and 1938 three significant offerings to Afrocuban narrative were published, and in those few short years, Alejo Carpentier, Rómulo Lachatañeré, and Lydia Cabrera epitomized Afrocuban literature’s emblematic inconsistency. All three captured Afrocuban literature’s proximity, and distance from, Afrocuban Studies as they created a web of connections and disconnections with Ortiz, Afrocuban Studies, international arts, and national politics.

ALEJO CARPENTIER AND THE FIRST NOVELA AFROCUBANA

Alejo Carpentier (1904-1980) is said to have coined the *novela afrocubana* — the “Afrocuban novel,” as a 1968 subtitle suggests — with *¡Ecué-Yamba-O!* (1927, 1933) (*Lord, Be Praised, Thou!*). Years after writing it, Carpentier offered a candid postscript when he addressed the place of academic research within the novel.

En una época caracterizada por un gran interés hacia el folklore afrocubano recién ‘descubierto’ por los intelectuales de mi generación, escribí una novela cuyos personajes eran negros de la clase rural de entonces. Debo advertir que crecí en el campo de Cuba en contacto con campesinos negros e hijos de campesinos negros, que más tarde, muy interesado por las prácticas de la *santería* y del ‘ñañiguismo,’ asistí a innumerables ceremonias rituales…. Pues bien: al cabo de veinte años de investigaciones acerca de las realidades sincréticas de Cuba, me di cuenta de que todo lo hondo, lo verdadero, lo universal, del mundo que había pretendido pintar en mi novela había permanecido fuera del alcance de mi observación. (1987: 11)
In a time characterized by great interest among intellectuals of my generation in recently ‘discovered’ Afrocuban folklore, I wrote a novel whose characters were rural blacks. I should clarify that I grew up in the Cuban countryside in contact with black countrymen and their children, and later, very interested in *santería* and *ñañiguismo* practices, I attended countless ritual ceremonies,... So then: after twenty years of investigation about Cuba’s syncretic realities, I realized that all that is deep, true, and universal in that world which I had attempted to capture in my novel had remained beyond observation’s reach]. (1987: 11)

Carpentier’s frustration rests upon his lack of direct cultural observation, a documentary shortcoming that fails to immerse the reader into a wholly Afrocuban experience. Afrocuban literature involves a necessary learning process on the part of its authors; non-Afrocuban writers of Afrocuban fiction must, by definition, undergo an academic/research process in order to grasp the cultural nuances they are attempting to represent. To paraphrase Carpentier, one must research Afrocuba before attempting to write it. Such research, at least for *Ecué*, was in fact insufficient: even after visiting “countless ritual ceremonies” and benefiting from “contact” with Afrocubans during childhood, the principal obstacle, Carpentier admits, was his own unfamiliarity with the very cultural subject he sought to portray – it was still beyond his “observation’s reach.” As troubling as it is that Carpentier first deemed his efforts up to par with interest in the “recently ‘discovered’ Afrocuban folklore,” later study revealed just how wanting

137 Carpentier’s essay traces the novelistic – *novelística* – process needed for a novel’s formulation, that very process to which he was not privileged in 1927 as he supposedly wrote the *Ecué* manuscript in a Havana prison. Miller cites portions of the same passage, indicating that Carpentier was treating phenomena “not accessible to an outside observer” (26). Carpentier “desires access to the profound interior of the Afro-Cuban being,” the critic clarifies, “yet he is limited to the outside, because his techniques of representation, including among others the form of the novel itself and the limited maneuverability of the observer, are inextricably tied to the Western tradition for which he is seeking an alternative” (26).
Carpentier’s earliest depiction was: “ciertas realidades americanas, por no haber sido explotadas literariamente, por no haber sido nombradas, exigen un largo, vasto, paciente, proceso de observación.” [“certain American realities, having not been explored literarily, having not even been named, demand a long, vast, and patient process of observation”] (11). Such reflection, which brings to mind Carpentier’s unrelenting faith in science and research, is paramount to understanding the Afrocuban artistic craze throughout the late 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, as artists assumed the task of premiering “certain American realities,” a venture mandating avid cultural documentation even when scholarship was not their central purpose. Thus, it is not surprising that, as in Carpentier’s case, initial Afrocuban depictions were inaccurate, or simply incomplete.

As he composed Ecué, the genre of the “Afrocuban novel” was so new that it had not even been “named” as such.

Years later Carpentier appended a prologue in which he briefed his reader with more scrutiny.

_Ecué_... se resiente de todas las angustias, desconciertos, perplexidades, y titubeos que implica el proceso de un aprendizaje. Para todo escritor es ardua la empresa de escribir una primera novela, puesto que los problemas del qué y cómo, fundamentales en la práctica de cualquier arte, se plantean de modo imperioso ante quien todavía no ha madurado una técnica ni ha tenido el tiempo suficiente para forjarse un estilo personal. (1989: 6)

[Ecué... is weakened by all of the distresses, disorders, perplexities, and hesitations implied by a learning process. The enterprise of writing a first novel is arduous for all writers, given that the problems of ‘what’ and ‘how,’ fundamental
to the practice of any art, terrify anyone who has neither matured in technique nor has had sufficient time to craft personal style]. (1989: 6).

Though we have already recognized these shortcomings, Carpentier recapitulates a fundamental notion of Afrocuban fictional narrative. Its proponents are seeking the “what” and “how” of the Afrocuban experience. That is, they wish to document Afrocuba completely and communicate it accurately while participating in up-and-coming artistic innovation. As a documentary undertaking, Ecué endeavors to impart this “what” and “how” to those Cubans familiarizing themselves with Afrocuban culture. On this level, the connection with Afrocuban Studies – and Ortiz – seems readily sustainable. Carpentier employs a scientific, documentary understanding of the subject he posits as art and, as such, it is not surprising that academic asides make their way into the manuscript. González Echevarría, in his essential reading of Carpentier (1977), meditates at length on many ostensible connections between Carpentier and Ortiz and the insertion of academic passages, which we will examine shortly. He echoes, first, Carpentier’s own estimation of his early production as “callow works in which only the barest outline of the future is discernible” (61). But he is also quick to point out the thematic attraction of Africa: “the alluring otherness of Afro-Cuban cultures, the cohesive religious force of which can become the source for a different writing, freed from the strictures of Western mentality” (61).

Specifying the quest for a “different writing” captures the vanguardia’s essence; Afrocuba certainly offered a “different” thematic. But proclaiming such avant-garde connections hindered coming to grips with what Carpentier’s Ecué really was: a failure to capture adequately the Afrocuban Other, in part as a result of the author’s documentary shortcomings.

In forty-two short chapters, a brief glossary of Afrocuban terms and cubanismos, and even referential photographs of Afrocuban ritual objects, Carpentier’s novel follows the brief life
of Menegildo Cué, an ingenio inhabitant who becomes fascinated with ñáñigo ritual, only to be murdered shortly after his initiation into the secret society. Thematic imprecision replaces initial critiques of North American commercialism with Menegildo’s ritual journey, amorous encounters, street skirmishes, and his stay in a Havana prison. Aside from sporadic attempts at avant-garde multi-perspectivism and surrealist imagery, Carpentier tunes the novel, for the most part, toward the personal Afrocuban experience. In this manner, the novel is most centrally concerned with the way the protagonist perceives himself as Afrocuban, how his ritual involvement invigorates cultural self-examination, and how he – or, fails to subsume – ñáñiguismo into his worldview. In Shaw’s summary, Ecué centers on Menegildo’s “black identity and experience” (7). If in Carpentier’s later novels these same emotions correspond to characters that possess an innate African superiority over natural and metaphysical cosmos, in Ecué the overriding sensation is that, prior to his violent death, Menegildo has not yet come to value his African heritage and is in fact ignorant of many of its traditions. A fundamental difference between Ecué and a later text as El reino de este mundo (1948), other than the geographic displacement (Cuba vs. Haiti), is that the latter’s protagonists, Ti Noel and company, are not taught the African experience; rather, the African experience is ingrained. The African man’s closeness to nature and access to the supernatural is presented as superior to the European worldview with which Carpentier does wonders in terms of his documentary research and its

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138 Shaw notes the avant-garde inclination surrounding Ecué. In response to Carpentier’s own musings on the matter, the critic states: “Just as this striving for a new mode of expression contrasted with the flat, unadorned style of realism, so the arrangement of the narrative, in which incidents and descriptions are presented from differing angles of vision, creates an order clearly meant to contrast with conventional linear plot development. ¡Ecué-Yamba-O! marks not the first, but the first really significant break with the realist/naturalist convention of novel-writing in Cuba” (10-11). It is important to recognize, echoing González Echevarría’s observation, the allusiveness of the Afrocuban as a literary phenomenon hitherto unexplored by means of an avant-garde aesthetic.
most salient result: *El reino de este mundo* is positioned squarely within the African, whereas *Ecué* had remained distant and unnatural. In other words, Carpentier’s failure to capture the Afrocuban Other in *Ecué* is outshined by his own later and more adroit representation of the Afro-Haitian Other. While logical reasons could account for this – once again, the differing geographical locales, a different historical period, etc. – the critical canon seems to agree that this is another representational weakness associated with the first novel. Shaw concedes, on the matter, that “It is not easy to link this convincingly with a notion of black superiority or greater ‘authenticity’” (9). Accordingly, *Ecué* is less formidable as a cultural enlightener. Its principal character’s derisory *afrocubanidad*, along with the narrator’s insistence upon portraying him through non-African narrative delineators, keeps the novel from fitting the bill of contemporary ‘cultural artifact,’ in the way some later Afrocuban narratives do. Or, in documentary/research terms: it fails to meet Ortiz’s stipulation of ‘authentic’ folkloric representation.139

The frame with which Carpentier captures Afrocuba is problematic by various standards, and to that effect, the critical canon has offered assorted commentary on the novel’s stylistic and thematic weaknesses. Di Leo, for example, notes that “[l]os comentarios de Carpentier sobre la religión afrocubana… conservan prejuicios propios de la época” [“Carpentier’s commentary on Afrocuban religion… conserves the epoch’s prejudices”] (108). Shaw contends, likewise, that “as the novel progresses Menegildo and the blacks generally tend increasingly to be presented in a grotesque and even comic light, when not in an implicitly hostile one” (9). Miller admits, finally, that “the problems of Carpentier’s first novel… are well known,” namely “the rupture resulting from the narrator’s desire to represent the Afro-Cuban from both the inside and the outside simultaneously” (25). Miller’s views connote the centrality of the narrator’s position to

139 See my Chapter Three above.
Afrocuban representation. Recall our rough binarism regarding such positionality – from and on Afrocuba. As the critic suggests, Ecué’s narrator is doubtless speaking on Afrocuba. Faulty observation, limited cultural access, and unbecoming portrayals of Afrocuban characters all mar the fashioning process and entail biased commentary, not to mention the supposedly Afrocuban elements conveyed through a stylistically Western narrator. Indeed, the merit of Ecué dwells largely on its novelty.

Carlos Alonso’s discussion (1990) of the autochthonous in the Latin American “regional” novels of the time is apt for our reading of Carpentier, as it grapples directly with such issues of cultural representation: “becoming an anthropologist to one’s own culture cannot guarantee the transcendence of the vicissitudes of cultural hermeneutics, since in the end the latter is but an extreme instance of intersubjective interpretation, and therefore partakes of its unavoidable difficulties and vagaries” (5). Indeed, Carpentier’s interpretation encounters such difficulties, but not only for the reasons Alonso notes. Insofar as Carpentier “becomes an anthropologist” of Afrocuba – a culture not his own – his reading wants for transcendence. Even if Ecué had been a successful incarnation of an Afrocuban worldview, the enterprise would have been futile, as “the particular characteristics of the autochthonous discursive situation conspire to foster the illusion that the cultural exegete has immediate and uncomplicated access to the phenomena of his own culture…” (5). Such an “illusion” of cultural “access,” in conjunction with Carpentier’s own admissions of faulty research, which condemn him as an unsuccessful “anthropologist to [his] own culture,” reiterates that Ecué leaves much to be desired while conceding that the novelist’s task was indeed daunting. Alonso’s premise suggests that Carpentier’s problem corresponds to a larger issue. Latin American “regional” novelists of the time – a category to which we add Carpentier for his timely “regional” delve into afrocubansimo – posit their own cultural readings
of their Latin American realities amidst a preoccupation with an “autochthonous cultural order” (17). That is to say, the times were characterized by a cultural enlightenment of sorts. ¡Ecué-Yamba-Ó! corresponds to such a motivation.

Indeed, when it comes to aptness for Afrocuban convention, Ecué’s omniscient (white) narrator tells us Menegildo is empowered with natural “rhythm.” “Era cierto que Menegildo no sabía leer, ignorando hasta el arte de firmar con una cruz. Pero en cambio era ya doctor en gestos y cadencias. El sentido del ritmo latía con su sangre” [“It was certain that Menegildo did not know how to read; not even knowing how to sign his name with an X. But on the other hand Menegildo was already a doctor of gestures and rhythms. Rhythmic sense pulsed in his blood”] (36). Although rhythmic potential is part of Menegildo’s nature, the narrator opposes his talent to non-instinctual skills by measuring reading/writing against music/rhythm. If the former are presented as trifling, the latter comprise instinctual Afrocuban cultural mainstays: they are, in the narrator’s words, part of one’s “blood.” What intrigues here is how narrative convention can produce a less-authentic portrayal and, as a result, focalize Afrocuba less appositely. In what Miller denotes as a narrative “from the outside,” such a comparative approach discloses the African only through comparison with the non-African, e.g. the non-Afrocuban (25). As such, it seems more on Afrocuba than from it, as Carpentier supplants an Afrocuban narrator for the Western narrative mode and relies upon presenting Afrocuba along with what he sees as non-Afrocuban equivalents. Simply put, the African is only made known through the pseudo-Western. Later Afrocuban narrators will attempt to create precisely the opposite effect. Cabrera’s and Lachatañeré’s narrators, for example, are positional ‘insiders’ who describe the Afrocuban frame from within (closer) and thus demonstrate a distinct Afrocuban epistemological discernment by eschewing Western juxtapositions. One should also note the elitist nuances
portrayed in the language of this particular passage. In his oppositional demarcation of writing-rhythm, the narrator views Menegildo as a “doctor of gestures and rhythms.” The non-African cultural ideal is also narrated through Western educational standards, and elitism and such description distances the narrator from further ‘inside’ as it reveals even more dependence upon a Western frame. Presenting the African (black) through the Western (white) filters Afrocuba through a non-Afrocuban narrative frame and inhibits any narrative mode that would evoke an Afrocuban worldview. What is more, as the narrator’s oppositional comparison reveals distaste toward Afrocuban privileges and maintains white cultural dominance, the place of ¡Ecú-Yamba-O! among Afrocuba’s narrative greats seems stunted.

Continuing Western narrative stylization in the same passage, Carpentier’s observations produce even more imprecision, as a non-celebratory tone further cements his disparaging premise. “Música de cuero, madera, huesos y metal, ¡música de materias elementales!... A media legua de las chimeneas azucareras, esa música emergía de edades remotas, preñadas de intuiciones y de misterio” [“Leather music, wood music, bone and metal music; music from such elemental materials!... As far as half a league away from the sugar mill’s chimneys, that music emerged from remote ages, full of intuition and mystery”] (37). Such reflection amounts to interpretive digression rather than true observation. To borrow again Miller’s language, it is etched “from the outside,” both in terms of the spatial positioning (the narrator views the scenario from afar) and the narrator’s unfamiliarity with the sounds (which seem foreign to him). That is, the whole scene construes Afrocuban music in “primitive,” and consequently inferior, terms. The imagery itself is self-condemning because such “elementary” music, presented as an annoying ruckus, permeates the scene as if it were smoke billowing from surrounding chimneys. Likening Afrocuban music to its rudimentary identifiers – “bone,” “metal,” “wood” – presents
those elements as primitive and atavistic. Specifically, the exclamation following this curtailed catalogue of Afrocuban musical instruments — “¡música de materias elementales!” [“music from such elemental materials!”] — congeals the narrator’s estimation of the instruments as inferior, not to mention its editorial tone. Dashing all hopes of narrating from within Afrocuba, the narrator’s commentary reveals exotic surprise. He is amazed to learn that Afrocuban musical mainstays stem from the present, not from “remote ages.” Such shortcomings notwithstanding, perhaps some appreciation is attempted upon recognizing the music’s historical wealth along with its “intuition” and “mystery.” As the narrator reminds us, it was precisely among these various scenarios that the young Menegildo learned to dance: “[e]n estas veladas musicales, Menegildo aprendió todos los toques de tambor, incluso los secretos” [“[i]n these musical spectacles, Menegildo learned the beats of the drum, including the secret ones”] (40). On some levels, then, the passage does attempt, regardless of the narrator’s restricting frame and problematic ideology, to fashion Afrocuba in a pleasing light. Admitting that there are “secret beats” indicates that the narrator recognizes Afrocuban/ñáñigo “secrecy” – elements to which he does not have access. But regardless of such attempts, Carpentier’s editorial digression – urged by an ever-Western gaze – situates the narrative at a distance from Afrocuban scholarship. Yet another moment that speaks to observational technique surfaces in a scene where Menegildo participates in a spell-casting ritual. After the protagonist’s infatuation with Longina drives him to call on Beruá for a potion that will entice her with his sexual advances, the narrator describes the priest’s syncretic altar. Though the portrayal brings into question the motivations behind the representation, it is at least accurate in its identification of Afrocuban deities.

140 Di Leo discloses that the purpose of the author’s visits to ñáñigo ceremonies “no era tanto la transcripción de la liturgia afrocubana sino el problema de cómo incorporar la música a la letra” [“was not so much the transcription of Afrocuban liturgy but rather the problem of how to incorporate music into the word”] (107). Carpentier’s source was “ethnomusicology” (106).
Se hallaba, por vez primera, ante las cosas grandes… En el centro, sobre la piel de un chato tambor ritual, se alzaba Obatalá, el crucificado, preso en una red de collares entremejidos. A sus píes, Yemayá, diminuta Virgen de Regla, estaba encarcelada en una botella de cristal. Shangó, bajo los rasgos de Santa Bárbara, segundo elemento de la trinidad de orishas mayores, blandía un sable dorado. (86)

[He found himself, for the first time, before the great things… In the center, placed upon the skin of a low ritual drum, was Obatalá, the crucified one, imprisoned in a network of interwoven necklaces. At his feet, Yemayá, the dwarf-like Virgen de Regla, was entrapped in a crystal bottle. Shangó, in the guise of Santa Bárbara (the second element of the orisha trinity), waved a golden saber]. (86)

Once again, instead of making efforts at presenting Afrocuba authentically, the narrator limits his portrayal to Western restrictions by privileging the Christian manifestations of the religious figures. While one cannot deny the syncretism innate to santería practices and the corresponding centrality of Christian symbols, the presentation further complies with the narrator’s presentation of Afrocuba through a non-Afrocuban lens. The descriptors are white, Christian, and superficially constructed. This will contrast, as we shall see, with later Afrocuban narratives where deities appear as fabled contributions – what actions made them famous, what they did, who they defeated, what natural realm they command, and so forth. The parenthetical reference also de-authenticates the narrative by interrupting its syntactical flow with reflection “from the outside” (Miller 25). The parentheses seem even more unnecessary when one considers Carpentier’s inclusion of a glossary as an appendix to Ecué. On the other hand, it is
important to concede that these elementary descriptions and definitional departures do serve a didactic end. Yet for the sake of maintaining fluidity in their fictional narratives, Lachatañeré and Cabrera tend to avoid in-text definitional parentheses. The larger part of their explanations of Afrocuban lore is found, instead, in their encyclopedic volumes, vocabularies, and catalogs. Along these lines, Carpentier includes a picture that references this specific scene. The caption cites the passage: “…Yemayá, diminuta Virgen de Regla, estaba encarcelada en una botella de cristal…” (1968: 81).

Even more telling are Menegildo’s reactions to the entire ritual experience. The narrator divulges that the protagonist entered Beruá’s back room altar “[p]alpitante de emoción, mudo, sudoroso” “[p]alpating with emotion, silent, and sweaty” (85) and that “[u]n estremecimiento de terror recorrió el espinazo de Menegildo” “[a] shuddering terror went through his spine” (86). He is afraid. In acknowledging such “terror,” the reader finds it difficult to believe that even the Afrocuban protagonist is positioned within Afrocuba. Even though the text makes clear that some of the protagonist’s ceremonial involvements are initiations, these reactions jostle the novel’s presentation. Menegildo’s later reaction to the witch is also surprising. As the narrator indicates, “Al verlo, Menegildo tuvo un sobresalto de sorpresa: su cabeza estaba coronada por un gorro adornado con plumas de cotorra, del que colgaban cuatro largas trenzas de pelo rubio” [“Upon seeing him, Menegildo was startled: the witch’s head was crowned by a hat adorned with parrot feathers, from which hung four long braids of blond hair”] (87). Presented more or less objectively, Carpentier contrasts his rhetorically drab description to the character’s reaction and to some ritual interaction between the two. This insight into the character’s personal reaction sustains Shaw’s articulation of the text’s “grotesque and even comic” presentations of Afrocubans (9). Speculations on the national repercussions of these comments generate mixed
review. On the one hand, the motivations behind the inaccurate observations could be simply didactic and seek to teach Cubans about their “Africanness.” On the other, attempts at widening national perceptions of Afrocuba seem hindered by the grotesque imagery associated with Menegildo and the ridicule with which black characters are perceived (Shaw 9).

It is more than obvious that, with regard to Ecué, Carpentier sidestepped any vigorous academic research. Furthermore, a fundamental failure in the narrative technique arises in language: the narrator’s reliance on Western descriptive modes results in a failure to capture the Other. Di Leo believes that in Ecué, “a nivel de la lengua, las diferencias entre lo visto y lo escrito eran abismales. Por un lado, los personajes de la novela hablan cubano, es decir que Carpentier transcribe a una grafía legible los vericuetos del habla bozal; por el otro, el narrador omnisciente y en tercera persona emplea la lengua de la literatura, habla ‘con propiedad’ y hasta con virtuosismo” [“at the level of language, the differences between what he saw and what he wrote were abyssal. On the one hand, the novel’s characters speak [Afro-]Cuban, that is to say that Carpentier transcribes to a legible writing the subtleties of bozal speech. Conversely, the third-person omniscient narrator employs literary language; he speaks properly and even with virtuosity”] (106). Scrutinizing one of the novel’s fundamental flaws, di Leo thus remarks on the “abyssal” link between observation and final product, Afrocuban subject and Western narrator. The ever-widening gap between Western narrator and Afrocuban characters is the leading factor in promoting such fissure. And yet, in light of Carpentier’s self-criticism concerning Ecué, all of these deficiencies must be taken in context. Though ideological imprecision at times even focalizes Menegildo and his counterparts by means of racist language, that such novelistic documentation of Afrocuba should have arisen was itself significant.
¡Ecué-Yamba-O!, then, is twentieth-century Afrocuba’s narrative avant-garde. Although the motivations were different, publication amidst both academic meditations on Afrocuba and nationalist issues allots greater significance than it set out to achieve. Recalling Moore’s insight, chronological proximity and the overarching Republican context inevitably entail connectedness (1997: 2). Upon reading Ortiz’s requests for national folkloric discovery, Ecué would have seemed like a natural place to start for Cuban culture learners. And while Carpentier did not actually capture “what he saw,” his motion is an important one for Afrocuban literature. In spite of the problematic evocation of Afrocuba in Ecué, it is undeniable that Carpentier offered a new take on novelistic literature, even if his preparation for that literature was faulty, as he himself went on to admit. As González Echevarría puts it, “[f]rom the very start, Carpentier is experimenting within an aesthetic movement that rejected the tenets and practice of Realism and the classical nineteenth-century novel” (63). Again, the Afrocuban thematic appears inviting for such an enterprise and, indeed, Ecué lacks the tenets or realism of its novelistic predecessors, or even the intricacies of the then-recent novela de la tierra. But if we previously posited that there existed an inevitable connection to Afrocuban Studies, regardless of Carpentier’s dislocation, we must also look for those textual marks that posit a linkage. González Echevarría notes a clear-cut nexus between Ortiz and Carpentier, if not through a direct personal relationship, then through the critical body on Afrocuba of the time.

It is in connection with [Ortiz’s] theories and descriptions that the novel assumes that ‘scientific exoticism’… and that accounts for the photographs included in the book, as well as for the descriptions of the various rituals. In Menegildo, Carpentier offers the life of a criminal, in the manner studied by Ortiz in Los negros brujos, except that his criminality is not seen completely as evil, but as the
result of the oppression to which the black man is subjected by white society, and by the tragic nature of the African world. (70)

Carpentier understood that academic research on Afrocuba was coming to light in those years. He makes an important statement when he notes that the “‘documentary’ aspect of the novel cannot be confused with the descriptions of the realistic novel,…. What is striking about the documentary tendency in ¡Ecú-Yamba-O! is the relative independence of these elements, their unmediated incorporation, as in an anthropological treatise” (70-71). Such “unmediated incorporation” resonates with attempts at anthropological documentation and, ironically, is what makes the text seem less ‘authentic’ in comparison with works by Cabrera and Lachatañeré. The irony lies in that, upon such elemental attempts at connecting Ecú with the anthropological corpus, Carpentier sacrifices the mysterious, the supernatural, and metaphysical scenarios of later Afrocuban narratives which encapsulate a so-called ‘authentic’ Afrocuban worldview in their coagulation with what we will call the ‘fantastic,’ though correlation with the ‘fabulous’ is also sustainable. Superficial attempts at such “documentation,” coupled with the fundamental shortfalls in the narrative’s language, signal the narrator’s positional distance from Afrocuba.

Tzvetan Todorov claims that the fantastic “implies an integration of the reader into the world of the characters; that world is defined by the reader’s own ambiguous perception of the events narrated” (31). It is not difficult to see that Ecú does not congeal entirely with Todorov’s delineation: the reader is rarely thrust into any narrative scenario that conjures such “ambiguous perception.” Later Afrocuban narrative, by contrast, does comply with this prerequisite. Again, Carpentier’s novel serves as a good measuring stick; appraising Lachatañeré’s and Cabrera’s narratives against its shortcomings reveals that the later narratives were clearly ambiguous. Perhaps the most discernible resonance with the fantastic lies in geographical setting. Ecú’s
setting is unambiguous: we always know from the outside narrator’s earliest descriptions where Menegildo is. This is not the case with later Afrocuban texts, which hinge upon geographic uncertainty. In what Todorov categorizes as the “exotic marvelous,” in the fantastic the “implicit reader is supposed to be ignorant of the regions where the events take place, and consequently he has no reason for calling him into question” (55). Afrocuban lore pieces offered by Lachatañeré and Cabrera do exactly that: they position characters (most often personified African/Yoruba deities) in unidentifiable geographical environs. If Menegildo traveled from the sugar mill to Havana, the latter’s orisha characters operate in an ambiguous locale. This is not to say that in the latter the setting is unrecognizable; the narrators mention mountains, rivers, and other natural markers. However, Cuban geographical nomenclature is never attached, and the reader is integrated into the “world of the characters” that functions upon nameless natural environs.

Geographical ambivalence in later Afrocuban fiction contributes to what Todorov sees as a basic “dilemma” of fantastic literature; a questioning that is fundamental to the reader’s reception of a so-called fantastic narrative. “The fantastic confronts us with a dilemma: to believe or not to believe? The marvelous achieves this impossible union, proposing that the reader believe without really believing” (83). This exemplifies post-Ecué Afrocuban fiction with precision. As we shall see, the narrative goings-on in texts such as Lachatañeré’s ¡Oh, Mío Yemayá! (1938) and Cabrera’s Cuentos negros de Cuba (1940) present “marvelous” scenarios that seem unbelievable and yet readily rose to the apex of contemporary Afrocuban lore artifacts. Their use of such precepts continually outshines the problematic Ecué narrator and seeks to present Afrocuba from within. The canonization of such later works as ‘authentic’ – that is, as meeting some sort of standard as acceptable Afrocuban literature – removes many overt national
signifiers. Thus, the geographical anonymity inherent to Lachatañeré and Cabrera, as will be seen, fits the bill of nationally representative fiction, without naming the nation directly.

RÓMULO LACHATAÑERÉ

Upon learning of the untimely death of Rómulo Lachatañeré (1909-1951) in a plane crash, Nicolás Guillén (El Nacional, Caracas, 1951) praised the scholar for his work on Afrocuba in ¡Oh, Mío Yemayá!: “Son, en realidad, narraciones breves, cargadas de poesía fresca, primitiva: relatos fabulosos en que se mueven las deidades más prestigiosas de la mitología africana, trasplantadas a Cuba en el barco negrero” [“[Yemayá’s stories] are, in truth, short narrations, loaded with fresh, primitive poetry: fabulous relations in which the most prestigious deities of African mythology move about, transplanted to Cuba in the slave ship”] (1968: 171). Guillén’s invocation of geography here is significant, though those qualities we previously identified as staples of a fantastic piece are only observed in part. Guillén’s reading sets itself apart in his insertion of the “fabulous” into the scheme, though he suggests that the narratives are set in Cuba, which is hardly the case. Indeed, Yemayá’s greatest source of marvelous, mysterious qualities – “primitive poetry” and “mythology,” to use Guillén’s language – is arguably its uncertain setting; characters wander about in a world where Cuban references are lacking. Yet Guillén’s reading does raise a paradox we have already touched upon: how can a geographically ambivalent narrative represent a national mindset? For the answer, we turn not to the narratives themselves, but to their paratexts. Lachatañeré’s tales are prefaced by Ortiz and compiled by the author’s glossary, two integral texts that render the “fabulous” mysteries definable, decipherable. These “scientific” pieces, the tools necessary to take on a national mindset, are the vehicles through which Cuba’s “Africanness” is communicated. In compliance with the scholarship
ideals embraced in *Archivos*, Lachatañeré offers his art, in conjunction with such academic supplements, as a matter of national heritage.\(^\text{141}\) Participating in the Afro-Cuban artistic milieu while capitalizing on academic research clarifies Lachatañeré’s nation-building enterprise. If such geographical manifestations are clarified by way of Lachatañeré’s textual inclusions, Lydia Cabrera chooses to leave such academic tools aside. Though the first *cuentos* collection did boast of Ortiz’s academic seal of approval, the prologue was short and offered little direct textual analysis. Ortiz’s prologue to Cabrera’s work was merely introductory, but his commentary on *¡Oh, Mío Yemayá!* was a developed essay that discussed the work, its national repercussions among folklorists, and prepared the reader for the type of narrative the collection offers. This should not be a surprise; Lachatañeré and Ortiz worked closely together, while Cabrera was not associated with academic treatments of Afrocuba until much later.

Lachatañeré’s scholarly contributions are much more extensive than his sole offering to Afrocuban literature, and, as we have seen, *¡Oh, Mío Yemayá!* (1938) is just as much scholarship as it is folkloric fiction. Heralding from a heightened climate of intellectual life and Afrocuban cultural marketing, *Yemayá* bears chronological proximity to Lachatañeré’s other significant studies on *Santería*, as well as his frequent deliberations in *Estudios Afrocubanos*. When considered along with Ortiz’s other prologues, the true dialogue between the two comes to light. Their interaction forged intellectual and artistic fronts for Afrocuba, and the discipline greatly

\(^{141}\) Guillén also offers rare insight into Lachatañeré’s own estimation of the work: “Rómulo no gustaba mucho de este libro, publicado, según él, ‘con cierta irresponsabilidad.’ Sin embargo, tiene más de una página bellamente lograda, y aunque el estilo en otras se desmaya y amenaza derrumbarse, siempre acuden a sostenerlo la gracia, el encanto de la fábula, la inocencia de la trama, desnuda de todo artificio literario, que logra imponerse por su fuerza esencial” [“Rómulo did not like this book much, as it was published, according to him, ‘with certain irresponsibility.’ However, it has its fair share of beautifully-composed pages, and even though the style at times falters and threatens falling out, gracefulness, the enchantment of the fable, the innocence of the plot, free from all literary artifices, manages to impose itself by its essential force”] (1968: 172).
profited from their polemic. Without question, *Yemayá* was a pivotal manifestation of such national literary celebrations. Also unquestionable was Lachatañeré’s intimate access to scholarly and fictive Afrocuban discourse. Carpentier’s *Ecué* was plagued by an aura of insufficient, biased, and even incorrect cultural observation; *Yemayá*, the result of intense field research, portrayed Afrocuba with sweeping documentation and accuracy. In keeping with such ‘authentically’ crafted Afrocuban tenets, it also made a much stronger case for the fantastic genre, as discussed above, and as a result, is readily identifiable as an Afrocuban fictional standard (Di Leo).

A French-Haitian mulatto, Lachatañeré had ‘ethnic access’ to the narratives he divulged. This privileged position notwithstanding, his position as a major thinker in Afrocuban studies removed textual quandaries stemming from inadequate depictions of the African. Whereas Carpentier did not completely observe the African, Lachatañeré’s investigation was comprehensive. Also important was the project’s timing. Carpentier put forth his novel on the cusp of the Afrocuban literary vogue; Lachatañeré’s timely release coincided with more established celebrations of *afrocubanidad*. The representational bar had been raised significantly within just five years. Although Lachatañeré’s work equates to a large corpus, *Yemayá*’s supernatural themes connect with such ethnographic giants as *Manual de santería* [*Santería Manual*] (1941) and *El sistema religioso de los Afrocubanos* [*The Afrocuban Religious System*] (1942) difficult. Conversely, it seems worth repeating that *Yemayá* is, at once, fiction collection and anthropology. Though the work is not as interrupted with scant documentary inclusions as
was Carpentier’s *Ecué*, *Yemayá* boasts a complete glossary and an explanatory prologue that allows the reader to understand the text without much cross-referencing.¹⁴²

*¡Oh, Mío Yemayá!* is made up of twenty-one short narratives, the glossary, and Yoruba ceremonial scripts. Each stylistically non-Western narrative traces a scenario relating to an Afrocuban god that evokes Afrocuban worldviews in each line. Lachatañeré’s representation sought a national goal, and his meticulous composition is quite telling for the construction of African national identity. Lachatañeré preambles that *Yemayá* intended to inspire others towards “la incorporación de lo negro – que está en mi carne – a la cultura nacional” [“the incorporation of the black – which is in my blood – into national culture” (XXXI)]. Echoing Ortiz’s pleas, these remarks solidify Afrocuban literature’s celebratory nature – that same nature forfeited for scant avant-garde stylistics in *Ecué*. Lachatañeré’s capacity grants his portrayal of Afrocuba a personal authenticity; these stories are “in his blood.” Following this portrayal is the use of Yoruba terminology and ritual verve over Cuban idiom, what di Leo plants as an “empleo metafórico de la lengua” [“a metaphorical use of language”] that must be supplemented with a glossary (64). In line with *Yemayá’s* self-proclaimed national nature, the author sees his work as a teaching mechanism that can transmit Afrocuba to culture-learners in the act of depicting such metaphors by means of the vocabulary’s assistance. As in the case of *Archivos*’s narrative snippets, Lachatañeré’s pieces have an unmistakable “didactic character,” though their literary merit far outshines those forerunners (65).

To suggest, however, that Lachatañeré’s *Yemayá* narratives were so non-Western in their stylization that they prevented successful Afrocuban cultural transmission would be untrue.

¹⁴² The prologue, written by Ortiz, is examined in close detail in Chapter Four. An important predecessor to these studies, though, is his “Lucumi” study in *Estudios Afrocubanos* (3 [1939], 4 [1940], 5 [1945-6]) which is even closer in publication to *Yemayá*. Lachatañeré’s fiction was augmented by a much greater body of his own scholarship published within the same years.
While the dialogue and ritual exclamation in Yemayá envelop a divinely supernatural and bewildering plane, the omniscient narratives surrounding them are straightforwardly precise, redolent of artistry and lacking Écué’s ambivalence. The third-person narrator thus remains generally descriptive and the dialogue comprises fabulous, supernatural themes. Even if Lachatañeré’s presentation does not want for such appealing themes as sex, romance, deceit, drinking, and trickery, moralistic fable lessons are also equally central to the stories; the same thread that appeared in Ortiz’s folkloric Archivos snippets is expounded upon here.  

“Orisaoco” is one narrative that embodies all of the work’s national and observational essences, themes, and typified fable-like ending. Tracking honest Orisaoco and his interactions with Obatalá, Changó, and Yemayá, the tale fables how “Changó se hizo dueño de los tambores” [“How Changó became owner of the drums”] (151). It is particularly representative of

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143 The moral aspect of these tales (and Cabrera’s) seems to be another unifying aspect of later Afrocuban narrative, one not embraced by Carpentier in Écué.

144 In Manual de Santería (1941) and El sistema religioso de los afrocubanos (1942), Lachatañeré defines each diety’s principal role. It is useful to use the author’s own research as background to his literary treatments. Again, we emphasize that the different textual natures of Yemayá and an ‘academic’ text such as Manual impede much analytical connection in this study.

“Obatalá posee las cabezas. Este ‘cargó’ la coloca unas veces en la categoría de las deidades, puesto que las cabezas implican el concepto de ángeles guardianes, es decir, de las deidades mismas. Otras veces, se ha de considerar a Obatalá como la dueña de la sabiduría” [“Obatalá possesses the heads. This ‘job’ sometimes places her within a divine categorization, being that the heads imply the concept of guardian angels, that is, of the gods themselves. At other times, Obatalá is considered as the owner of wisdom”] (1992: 101). “Changó, equivalente de Santa Bárbara, patrona de las tempestades y santa guerrera, se apodera de sus ‘hijos’ simulando el rodar de los truenos en el espacio. Así, sus seguidores ruedan dando vueltas por el suelo, hasta que se incorporan, corren al altar de el santo, y tomando un manto rojo lo tercian a la espalda, montan un caballo de madera y, tomando una espada simulada en la misma forma, adoptan poses militares con garbo y gallardía, aunque a veces hablan en un tono afeminado” [“Changó, equivalent to Saint Barbara, patron of the storms and the saint of war, takes power over his ‘children’ simulating the sounding of thunder in space. Thus, his followers circle around and around on the ground until they are incorporated, they run to the saint’s altar, and taking a red cloak they fill in his back, mount a wooden horse, and taking the simulated back in this form, adorn military poses with gracefulness, although sometimes they talk in an effeminate tone”] (1992: 99). Changó is also “dueño del rayo, los tambores,” [“owner of the thunderbolt, the
Lachatañeré’s ability to fuse didacticism with the narrative confusion – e.g. the fantastic – that exemplifies Afrocuban folk prose. In keeping with such a premise, seemingly impossible scenarios are juxtaposed to central tenets of Afrocuban lore. An early passage captures an essential characteristic of his work, as the narrative is at once descriptive, syntactically rhythmic, and thematically fantastic. After being tested by Obatalá for his honesty, the goddess gives him the task of seeding her fields.

Con su espíritu laborioso y su fina sagacidad para ocultar su labor, Orisaoco llenó de un lado a otro los campos de Obatalá de sembrados, y en las noches apacibles, el caminante que aventuraba sus pasos por aquel sitio, no dejó de escuchar el murmullo de los ñames parleros que asomaban su cabeza a la superficie de aquellos montones de tierra que semejantes a unas tumbas en larga hilera les servían de albergue contándose sus cuitas, por hacer uso de la facultad que les había dispensado Olofí de expresarse como las personas. (1938: 146)

[With his laborious spirit and his shrewdness at hiding his work, Orisaoco seeded Obatalá’s fields from one side to the other, and on peaceful nights, the traveler who ventured his steps on that site could make out the talking crops murmuring as they stuck their heads out toward the surface of those earthen mountains that seemed a long row of tombs that served as shelter counting its grief, by making use of the faculty that Olofí had dispensed them to express themselves as people]. (1938: 146)

_Yemayá is the owner of the sea and she has been identified with Our Lady of Regla, patroness of the bay of Havana, and with her sanctuary in that same city_” (1992: 40).
The passage embraces at once a style and theme that make it a posterchild of sorts for ambiguous narrative. The flowing syntax allots a rhythmic drive, which keeps the passage moving along with ideas. Thematically, it embodies those themes and legendary features that frequent Afrocuban literature and make repeated appearances in Lydia Cabrera’s works: talking plants, divine power, working the land, and natural landscapes. Immediately striking is how all such elements comply with a non-Western narrative frame. Not relying upon comparisons that relate mysterious Afrocuban phenomena to non-African counterparts (as it happens in Carpentier’s case), this author narrates from within Afrocuba in two ways. First, that which is unknown or surprising in the text remains as such, without taking recourse in parenthetical digressions. Mysterious gods are not cast in Christian terms, personified plants are viewed/described with an air of normalcy, and deities “express themselves as people” for no other reason than that a superior orisha so deemed it.145 Lachatañeré’s insistence upon such mimesis and narrative conventions embraces questions of positionality. Afrocuban access, augmented by hefty calls for accuracy in folk representation, allowed him to sidestep a purely Western narrative approach in the same way that they plunge into mysterious, supernatural and uncanny themes that evoke the syntactical mimesis of oral, legendary, lore. All of which makes for a more difficult read, just as much as it presents shocking themes so that the reader becomes increasingly reliant upon the prologue and the vocabulary.

Second, the anonymity of the natural landscape complies with a key trait of Afrocuban narrative: its characters are presented in a non-Cuban environment. Cuba could be the locale, but there are no explicit markers. Narrating from within Afrocuba appears to entail a break with overtly national signifiers. Thus, in keeping with our previous discussion of the fantastic and the

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145 Again, the connection with magic realism should be clear.
“fabulous,” Lachatañeré’s collection maintains the geographical ambivalence that keeps the reader questioning and hence upholds fantastic ideals. Again, the didacticism of such relations lies in the textual aides that encase the narrative. Carpentier was bent on portraying the twentieth-century ingenio context; Lachatañeré’s narratives are situated in timeless, nameless environs.

As Lachatañeré’s principal task in Yemayá is to depict Afrocuban religious personalities, each tale relies heavily upon character-building techniques. Therein rests another salient feature of Afrocuban narrative: lessons with morals that hone in on each character’s action, its consequences, and a moral. Therefore, each is simply titled by the character’s name in question. In keeping with such methods, the prescribed technique is one of Manichaean contrast: if one figure is praised for its honesty, its counterpart appears as deceptive and manipulative. Such is the depiction of Yemayá, whose goal in “Orisaoco” is to figure out the title character’s secret plan and prevent its success. To do so, she capitalizes on her sexual prowess and the protagonist’s budding sexual urges. “Yemayá sagazmente lo espiaba, siguiendo atentamente todos sus movimientos; mas, el labrador perdía tan ágilmente los retoños del ñame en la tierra, que la omordé quedaba estupefacta, sin lograr descubrir la maniobra, por lo que decidió abordar de una vez a Orisaoco y obtener el secreto con sus caricias” [“Yemayá shrewdly spied on him, following all of his movements intently. But the farmer so agilely lost the ñame’s shoots in the earth that the omordé remained gawked at not being able to discover the maneuver, so she decided to approach Orisaoco and get the secret by caressing him”] (1938: 147). The narrative presents, by way of a triangular conflict, the character that eventually will end in Orisaoco’s demise. The protagonist will give into her curiosity and sexual advances; upon breaking Obatalá’s code, the results become damning. The omniscient narrator then turns to the
protagonist’s downfall: “Orisaoco, profundamente abatido, internóse en el monte, llevando a
cuestas el excesivamente caro precio que la omordé puso al hallazgo de su hombría. Y jamás se
ha sabido del joven casto que con su azada al hombro marchaba con paso garboso e iba a cultivar
los sembrados de la apacible Obatalá” [“Orisaoco, profoundly taken down, went away to the
mountain, carrying with him the excessively expensive price that the omordé placed on the
discovery of his manhood. And no one has heard of the chaste young one who, with his hoe
upon his shoulder, went away gracefully to cultivate Obatalá’s crops”] (1938: 149). Lachatañeré
concludes this portion with the protagonist’s refuge into nature. Pitching the moral, Orisaoco’s
flaw has forfeited success – lack of integrity made him fail Obatalá’s test. The tale’s plot, then,
is simple: when the protagonist does not meet the orisha’s stipulations, his retreat marks the
main theme’s end.

The concluding passage, presented as an afterthought to Orisaoco’s story, capitalizes on
legend style and demonstrates how Afrocuban narrative revolves around both stylistic urgency
and moral fable, all the while evoking a fantastic mode. We cite the passage at length in order to
demonstrate dialogue, another of Lachatañeré’s narrative masteries.

Changó cargó su caballo de ñames, y se aventuró por los montes, cantando su
presentación triunfal ante la dueña de los atables:

Ilé mí, ilé masó
sacuata ilé,
indíá acucó...

Llegado a ella, arrojó los ñames a sus plantas; le expresó que le era muy grato
servirla en momentos tan difíciles y le brindó su humilde ayuda. Obatalá le
contestó. ‘Me has hecho un gran favor; llévate los tambores y diviértete por
espacio de seis días en el güemilere; luego, devuélvemelos!’ Y le entregó los

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atabales. Cumplido el plazo, Yemayá le dice a Changó: ‘Dame los tambores para llevárselos a su dueña, la cual los retendrá por unos pocos momentos, pues hoy han de ser definitivamente tuyos.’ Changó accede y se los entrega e inmediatamente son reintegrados a Obatalá; mas, ésta, al tomarlos en sus manos, los arroja al suelo, dando muestras de asco, y dice: ‘No los quiero; llévatelos de aquí!’ Fue que Yemayá los untó con orí, y los escrúpulos de Obatalá son de calidad tan fina, que pasando en alto las asechanzas que había puesto a la trama de Yemayá, se dejó vencer por la sagacidad de esta omordé. Así Changó se hizo dueño de los tambores. (1939: 150-51)

[Changó loaded his horse with yams and ventured off for the mountains, singing of his triumph before their owner:..... Upon arriving, he flung off the yams and, offering his humble help, he expressed to her that he was thrilled to serve her in such difficult moments. Obatalá answered: ‘You have done me a great favor. Take the drums and enjoy them for six days in the güemilere. Later, return them to me!’ And he handed over the drums. With the task completed, Yemayá tells Changó: ‘Give me the drums so I can carry them to their owner, who will hold them for a few moments and today they shall definitely be yours.’ Handing them over, Changó agrees and they are immediately returned to Obatalá; but, upon taking them in her hands, she throws them on the floor in disgust, saying: ‘I don’t want them. Take them away from here!’ It ended up that Yemayá gathered them with orí, Obatalá’s hesitations are of such a fine quality that, passing over the traps that had been set by Yemayá’s ploy, she let herself be defeated by that.
omordé’s shrewdness. This is how Changó became owner of the drums]. (1939: 150-51)

In its nonchalant portrayals of divine happenings, nameless natural locales, and thematic consistencies – jealousy, greed, and deceit – the passage complies with the Afrocuban call to authenticity. Lachatañeré continues Afrocuban oral stylization by affixing a rapid succession of dialogue to his conclusion. Also authenticating is the inclusion of Changó’s lyricism. While we follow a logical transition from Orisaoco to Changó via the ñames, the remaining dialogue bears a mysterious air that strains logical cause-and-effect sequence. Exactly how the drums end up in Changó’s control is debatable, for we are only told of Yemayá’s “traps” after Obatalá suddenly refuses to take them. The dialogue, urgently posited, blurs the actions behind the conversation and the reader is left confused; not even the glossary can offer much aid. But when the story’s functional end arrives (in the sense that it serves to explain some aspect of Afrocuban lore), Lachatañeré lets go of the narrative chaos and explains the moral directly: “how Changó became owner of the drums.”

It has already been posited that Lachatañeré’s work abounds in scientific connections. It is important to reiterate, however, that the intricacies of scientific study and literary effort draw equally upon accurate representation. Literary accuracy and scientific precision were two of Lachatañeré’s most fervent ideals. Glancing through his Manual de Santería [Santeria Manual] (1941) and El sistema religioso de los afrocubanos [The Afrocuban Religious System] (1942) reveal just how capacious his scholarship was. These studies, and a string of articles on Cuba’s “mulatto nation,” etch a research parallel to Yemayá. Lachatañeré’s work is concerned with disseminating knowledge on Afrocuba and correcting Afrocuba’s misnomers. It is no surprise that Guillén should have lauded Lachatañeré’s academic work. In his estimation of Manual de
santería, for example, he stated the following: “En él se propuso Lachatañeré examinar los fenómenos del sincretismo religioso en Cuba desde ángulos nuevos, en oposición a los métodos académicos” [“In [Santería Manual], Lachatañeré proposed to examine the phenomena of religious syncretism in Cuba from new angles, in opposition to academic methods”] (1968: 172). We will see in this study’s epilogue just how “innovative” Lachatañeré’s “academic” approaches to Afrocuba in fact were. We cite this passage for its prime recognition of the incisiveness of Lachatañeré’s work among the ethnographic body of the time. What Guillén saw as a “new angle” that was “in opposition” to the “academic methods” of the time posits yet another paradox within the Afrocuban phenomenon. It is a given that the “academic methods” surrounding Afrocuba point undoubtedly to Ortiz, of whom Lachatañeré was a disciple. Thus, Guillén’s statement suggests that Lachatañeré’s work differs from the Afrocuban ethnographical establishment; it sets itself apart from Ortiz. Afrocuba’s discursive plurality is at work again as “new angles” emerged within Afrocuban research; Ortiz himself praised the work for its coincidence with the folkloric initiatives he himself laid out.146

LYDIA CABRERA

An authority on Afrocuba, Lydia Cabrera (1900-1991) produced anthropology and fiction for upwards of forty years. Ortiz’s relative and academic disciple, Cabrera’s career was loosely framed by the momentous tasks of documenting Afrocuba artistically and scientifically. Years of writing in Paris and field research in Cuba yielded sweeping scholarship on many areas, though her commentary reveals she produced such work in a manner atypical to ethnography.146

146 It is futile to attempt to discern whether Lachatañeré went against or with Ortiz. He did both. Ortiz sees alignment in his Yemayá prologue, while the two most certainly butted heads on more than one occasion, as was the case with the polemic surrounding the Lucumí study and Ortiz’s public remarks on the term brujo (discussed in detail in Chapter Four).
Lachatañeré modified Ortiz’s work into a “new angle” of Afrocuban Studies; Cabrera’s fieldwork was still more innovative. *El monte: notas sobre las religiones, la magia, las supersticiones y el folklore de los negros criollos y el pueblo de Cuba* [*The Wilderness: Notes on the Religions, Magic, Superstitions, and Folklore of Black Creoles and the Cuban People*] (1954), for example, is a massive text that catalogues Afrocuban religious practice and beliefs. The “notes” subtitle preludes the overarching tone of Cabrera’s ethnographic work, pointing to the massive cataloging endeavors surrounding her ethnographic/academic work. Enriched by histories, vocabularies, dictionaries, and glossaries that maintain the same tone (e.g. *Anagó: Vocabulario Lucumí* [1957] and *La sociedad secreta Abakuá* [1958]), her work continues to garner critical attention today. Collections of Afrocuban fiction further cemented her acclaim, as *Cuentos negros de Cuba* [*Cuban Black Stories*] (1940), *Por qué...cuentos negros de Cuba* [*Why... Cuban Black Stories*] (1948), and *Ayapá: cuentos de Jicotea* [*Ayapá: Stories of the Turtle*] (1971) epitomize Afrocuban narrative. It is also difficult to get her “fiction” to fit the mold of her counterparts; avoiding the mulatto nation metaphor – evidenced by the overarching sensation in her cuentos that there is a lack of transculturative synthesis – strains stringent nationalist boundaries. Drawing from intense ethnographic field research and literary talent, Cabrera fused anthropology and fiction, and, as one recent critic puts it, “[s]us textos se sitúan en la línea fronteriza entre antropología y literatura, y ella, en un camino intermedio entre autor (fundador de discursividad) y escritor (productor de textos concretos)” [“[h]er texts are situated between anthropology and literature, and she between author (founder of discursivity) and writer (producer of concrete texts)”] (Ochando Aymerich 8). Cabrera Infante’s telling coinage for this positionality, “antropoesía” [“anthropoetry”], captures the inextricability of literary and scholarly
modes (8). Finally, Campaña notes that Cabrera’s “great merit” is that she treats her scholarship so artistically, making us “sentir, ver, comprender e imaginar, como es propio del arte, el mundo afroamericano, mágico y vivo, que ella supo describir y amar” [“feel, see, understand, and imagine, as is natural with art, the African American world, magical and alive, that she knew how to describe and to love”] (67). In her “fiction” and her scholarship, Cabrera’s innovative mode blurs the lines between art and academic research.

This compact description, however, is too straightforward to fit the bill of an Afrocuban literate. Indeed, Cabrera’s connection with mainstream Afrocuban academic research can be as proclaimed as it can be denied. In fact, mentioning Cabrera’s ethnographic offerings and fictional narrative in such confining requisites seems to speak of the impossible; like no other, she typifies the Afrocuban paradox. A textual quandary surrounds her work, feeding upon the array of Afrocuban paradoxes that allot Cabrera’s work a fundamental ambivalence. A good starting point for addressing this complex figure is Ortiz’s prologue to her first narrative collection – discussed in Chapter Four – and the uncertainty surrounding it. We recall that Ortiz was pleased with the Cuentos as they complied with national folkloric initiatives (Estudios Afro cubanos 4 [1940]: 130). But the connection was not, to her mind, so close.

Fernando no me llevó a estos estudios. Déjame decirte que a Fernando Ortiz, que era mi cuñado, yo lo quería mucho, y lo recuerdo con gran cariño… Te repito, fue en París, donde empecé a interesarme en África…. Cuando volví a Cuba, y

\[147\] Cabrera Infante has noted that Cabrera’s antropoesía [“anthropoetry”] had significant repercussions outside of Cuba. “Los hallazgos hechos por Lydia Cabrera en lo que podría llamarse antropoesía abrieron sendas en toda América, donde los cultos de lo oculto practicados por negros iniciados, desde Haití hasta el Brasil, son a menudo más poderosos que en África. No fue en el continente negro donde se creó el vudú, sino en América” [“Lydia Cabrera’s findings in what could be called anthropoetry forged paths in all of America, where the hidden customs practiced by black initiates, from Haiti to Brazil, are frequently more powerful than in Africa. It was not the black continent where voodoo was created, but rather in America”] (89).
me metí de lleno a informarme en las viejas fuentes…, le contaba a Fernando mis experiencias, cuando nos veíamos. (Cabrera in Hiriart 1978: 73-74)

[Fernando did not lead me to those studies. Allow me to say that I loved my brother-in-law Fernando Ortiz much, and I remember him with much affection… I repeat: it was in Paris where I started to become interested in Africa…. When I returned to Cuba and I got fully involved with becoming versed in the old sources…, I shared my experiences with Fernando when we saw each other.]

(Cabrera in Hiriart 1978: 73-74).

Despite such remarks, the Ortiz connection is hard to ignore, especially when one considers the unwavering tenets of encyclopedism that piloted her principal studies (e.g. *El Monte* [1954] and *Lucumí* [1957]), in which Cabrera proves to be a documentary machine in her own right. Writer of encyclopedic compendia or not, Cabrera tells us that her motivation for composing her ethnographic studies was their artistic potential. When asked why she wrote *El Monte*, she responded: “Acaso por el deslumbramiento que me produjo aquel mundo real e insospechable, de creencias, de leyendas,… de poesía” [“Perhaps because of the bewilderment of that real and unsuspecting world of beliefs, legends,… of poetry”] (Cabrera in Hiriart 1978: 79). Cabrera clearly esteemed her ethnographic work as art, as “poetry.” The reasoning behind her fascination, which lies in Afrocuba’s mystery, explains her rejection of dry, academic treatments of Afrocuba, and her grasp of Afrocuba’s “natural” artistry.

Thematically speaking, Cabrera’s fiction capitalizes on that religious and legendary material that was pursued by Lachatañeré. The fabulous plays against simpler themes of love, power, deceit, and trickery. Cabrera’s genius lies in adroit narrative manipulation. Instead of
narrating Afrocuban lore from an academic niche, she elects the more privileged position of artist, of fiction writer. An important underpinning to her work resides in the textualization of non-textualized lore, as the fiction-writing process writes mimesis of oral tradition in its recording of first-person interviews with Afrocuban subjects. Her insistence on construing her narratives as fiction (and not, for example, transcripts from interviews) allots her work an urgent quality and, at times, confusion all the more redolent of the Afrocuban worldview. That is to say, her estimation of the Cuentos as fiction, as art, removes academic obstacles that might impede communication. Moreover, Cabrera goes so far as to correlate the Cuentos with her childhood imagination, which distances the works further from scholarship: “Los Cuentos no fueron el producto de años de labor, sino de… ¿cómo explicarlo?, de un reencuentro con el mundo de fantasía de mi primera infancia, con el que nunca rompí.” [“The Cuentos were not the result of years of labor but rather – how to explain it? – the result of a reencounter with the fantastic world of my childhood, which I never left”] (Cabrera in Hiriart 1978: 74-75). Hence, Cabrera’s cuentos omit the typical vocabulary and explicative prologue. Di Leo muses at length on how Cabrera’s fiction revolves around the anthropological interview, a mainstay of Cabrera’s work: “Y así la entrevista, que en Lydia Cabrera llegó a ser un estilo además de un método, tampoco es ajena a este libro de historia oral [La sociedad secreta Abakuá]. Para conservar el carácter de transmisora de una tradición que por definición le es inalcanzable, Cabrera repite hasta el cansancio que los testimonios llegan al libro inalterados, las expresiones intactas, las ideas sin censurar. [“And thus, the interview, which in Lydia Cabrera came to be stylistic rather than methodological, is not far from this book of oral history either [The Abakuá Secret Society]. In order to preserve the… character of a tradition that is by definition unattainable, Cabrera repeats incessantly that the testimonies in the book are unaltered, with the expressions intact and
the ideas uncensored”) (112). Di Leo identifies a clear connection to Ortiz’s tenets of folkloric research, as presented in the Archivos. And yet, for Cabrera, the interview was a “stylistic” rather than a “methodological” venture, which accounts for her attraction to the artistic – again, “poetic” – potential in the information she gathers. This is not only a possible imbrication with Ortiz’s research methodology. It is also, by extension, an invocation of national arts, and it gels with the folklorists’ efforts at communicating the Afrocuban nation as it was: authentically. In this way, Cabrera’s cuentos, like the “poetry” she was trying to capture, must be read aloud; they evoke African orality in their depiction of Afrocuba. Thus, we highlight a key difference between Cabrera’s so-called scientific work and her literary “fiction”: the former embraced a style that captured Afrocuban orality and originality; the latter partook of such inspirations in the crafting of legendary fiction. No matter how inspired by African/Yoruba lore, Cabrera’s fictional narratives do not purport to be anything other than art, narrative poetry, mimesis of oral lore that needs no major academic companion source. Her documentation and literary representation cross paths, upholding African symbolism and creating another set of contemporary Afrocuban artifacts, ‘instant classics’ of Afrocuban narrative that blur the lines between science and art.

We will analyze two of Cabrera’s narratives. The first, “Tatabisaco,” from Cuentos negros de Cuba (1940), contrasts a mother’s irreverence and Afrocuban ritual ignorance with her husband’s valor and spiritual access to nature. From this contrast we extract a significant meditation on Afrocuban nationality; at story’s end, we must conclude that if one is socially acceptable within the Afrocuban worldview, the other is socially damning. The opening words capitulate this contrast: “Las mujeres se iban desde muy temprano a labrar la tierra. Sembraban maní, ajonjolí, arroz, yuca y ñame y quimbombó. Los hombres a la selva, a cazar” [“The women
went early to work the field. They sowed *maní, ajonjolí,* rice, mantioc, and okra. The men went to the jungle to hunt”) (2002: 117). While such an opener appears simple, it entails more than just basic occupational descriptions of Afrocuban men and women, as the text reveals later that “hunting,” as opposed to planting or sowing, involves a deeper natural connection between man and animal; that is, it reveals an intimate knowledge of and connection to the land and its religious tradition. The narrator’s description of the husband, for example, reveals he is far more than a good hunter. “Era un buen cazador: nunca volvía de la selva con las manos vacías. Sabía atraer a los animales. Comprendía su idioma. Conocía el origen, las trastiendas de cada uno; y el canto que los cautiva de antemano, untando en la flecha” [“He was a good hunter, never returning from the jungle empty-handed. He knew how to attract animals; he understood their language. He knew their origin, their cunning, and the chants that captivated them before nabbing them with his arrows”] (2002: 120-21). What at first glance seems like a gendered delineation actually amounts to a spiritual meditation, the likes of which are developed throughout the piece.

While the mother was presented in human, earthly, and implicitly demeaning terms, the man is presented as a spiritual being.

The female character’s *negrito* son generates the conflict that gets the story underway. The narrative establishes the child’s peril in an aggressive situation: as his mother tends to the fields, her son cries miserably: “El matojo se quedaba sin sombra, el sol empezaba a caerle a borbotones, en plena cara, al negrito; lo invadía todo abrasando. Lo picaban los mosquitos, las

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148 Notice also the spiritual characterization of the hunter and the subsequent privilege placed on the man’s interaction with animals. “El espíritu del hombre se tornaba al bosque… Fantasma en los senderos de la caza, con su arco mágico y su gran cuchillo, perseguía toda la noche los fantasmas alargados de los animales en fuga: cacería vertiginosa” [“The man’s spirit headed towards the woods. Ghost-like on the hunting trails with his magic bow and his great knife, during the whole night he went after the ghosts extending from the fleeing animals. It was a dizzying hunt”] (2002: 118).
hormigas. Las moscas se le metían en la boca; se levantaba el viento y le llenaba los ojos de polvo ardiendo. Lloraba todo el día. La madre nunca interrumpía su faena” [“The boy was left without shade and the sun started to boil the negrito’s face; the burning was invading him. Mosquitos and ants bit him. Flies entered his mouth, and when the wind blew it filled his eyes with burning dust. He cried all day long, his mother not once interrupting her work”] (2002: 117). Amidst such natural oppression we learn of the mother’s culpability: she leaves her son to be tortured while she works the land. The scenario sets the stage for Afrocuban divine intervention, as “el Amo Agua de la Laguna” [“Master of the Lake”] comes to her boy’s aid. The viejo, described as having “el pecho de lodo negro” [“a chest of black mud”] a “verdoso” [“greenish”] body, and beards that reached “por toda la superficie del agua” [“over the water’s surface”], takes pity on her and promises to watch over the negrito for her (118). Once this stage is set, we learn that the story’s central premise centers on language. The mother’s lack of oral proficiency in ritual language is repeatedly addressed, and it eventually incites the theft of her son. When faced with the “Master of the Lake,” she is unfamiliar with the appropriate language and is thereby unable to address the creature properly. “No sabía hablar: no supo darle las gracias, como era debido” [“She didn’t know how to talk to him, not even how to give him his due thanks”] (2002: 118). And later: “Cuando la mujer echó en los surcos las simientes, le hizo regalo de un chivo a Tatabisako. Pero hablaba muy mal. No supo ofrendárselo con palabras justas. Le dijo: ‘Coma chico con hijo tó.’ Y el viejo se retiró muy ofendido en su corazón” [“When she threw the seed on the field, she gave Tatabisako a goat. But she did not talk well, and she didn’t know how to offer it to him with the proper words. She told him: ‘Coma chico con hijo tó.’ And the old man left saddened in his heart”] (2002: 119). Significant here is that Cabrera’s narrative leaves the erroneous ritual intact, and the reader is privileged to a concrete
indicator of Afrocuban orality. That is, we “hear” firsthand how the woman fails at ritual language, and how her inability to communicate devalues the ritual offering and saddens the divine lake creature. Ritual bungling results in the son’s theft. As only father’s natural savvy can mend the situation, the tale’s conclusion eulogizes father and condemns mother, honoring natural fluency while denouncing ritual ineptitude. “El Cazador se llevó a su hijo. El negrito dormía… Y ella, la mujer, escondiéndose como un animal entre las sombras, como un animal que va a morir, se fue muy lejos – y para siempre –; no se supo nunca adónde” [“The Hunter carried his sleeping son away… And his wife, hiding as an animal among the shadows, like an animal about to die, went far away for ever – no one knew where”] (2002: 123). Mother’s unfamiliarity with Afrocuban oral language equates to spiritual irreverence and reveals unfamiliarity with her own heritage. Her actions result in her marginalization – damned to the wilderness to live like an animal.

Though fable-like and moralistic, this tale could speak allegorically to the Afrocuban nation as well. In its Republican context, Cabrera’s tale allegorizes, albeit quite implicitly, calls for self-exploration into the national consciousness, pleading with Afrocubans and white Cubans alike to come to grips with their heritage – in this case, language. Though di Leo’s study reveals that with her late work Cabrera was insistent upon not altering her ethnographic sources attained through fieldwork and interviews, she etched her cuentos as fiction, as art. In nation-building terms, the allegory condemns those not well versed in their own heritage. As the mother’s fate was sealed through her unfamiliarity with African mythology and ritual, so too Cuba ought to heed the scholars’ calls beckoning Cubans to learn of their mulatto heritage. The exemplary model is the father, whose familiarity with his native land is outmatched only by his grasp of his lore heritage. Thus, while the cuentos uphold nationalist folk initiatives in their documentation
of Afrocuban legacy, their thematic also extols culture learning. Such morals can be extracted more readily from certain cuentos than from others, and Cabrera’s own take on such national value cannot be documented. Cabrera’s insistence that the works be seen as art, her insistence that her academic works were etched for poetic reasons, and her recoil from pure anthropology, would seem to indicate otherwise. But the national implications of such work seem more palpable when we consider that Africa was in the most basic cultural definitions of the time, as epitomized by Ortiz’s transculturation concept, permeated Cuban culture, itself an intensely racialized system (Moore 1997: 2). As we have seen, however, Cabrera’s fiction cannot be straitjacketed into national projects: the national messages, while explicit staples of Ortiz’s and Lachatañeré’s work, are implicit nuances in Cabrera’s cuentos.

“El algodón ciega a los pájaros” [“Cotton Blinds the Birds”] (1948) best fits the fable genre and leaves aside the many of Tatabisaco’s possible national inquiries. The story involves a cast of personified animals and concludes with a moral typical of Afrocuban tradition. Complying with a didactic premise, Cabrera begins by giving background to the tale’s religious characters: “Olofi, el Dios infinitamente lejano e incomprensible, creó el universo. Hizo a Obatalá. Obatalá hizo al Hombre, le traspasó un poco de su inteligencia, le dio la voluntad. Obatalá es el más grande de todos los Orishas. Obatalá es el hacedor de las cabezas, el dueño, el modelador de las Almas” [“Olofi, the infinitely distant and incomprehensible god, created the universe. He made Obatalá. Obatalá made Man, living him a bit of his intelligence and free will. Obatalá is the greatest of all of the orishas. Obatalá is the maker of heads, the owner, and the modeler of souls”] (68). This preamble surpasses momentarily the typical narrative ambiguity for straightforward orientation as a mythical script. It is important to note, however, that Cabrera does not portray this information as an academic digression. Rather, she keeps
didacticism within the lines of the oral tradition she is capturing. These ‘lessons’ retain their orality as they portray Afrocuban lore; in their brevity and simplicity they make no mention of Western delineators. Cabrera pilots her narrative within the Afrocuban narrative mode, and even the lore pieces uphold the fable.

The following passage demonstrates a compact regimen of Afrocuban narrative structures and contents we have seen elsewhere. We cite at length so that its narrative insight can be seen as a whole.

Y he aquí lo que tramó la Pajarería para hacer desaparecer a Oú de la faz de la tierra del modo más seguro. Los Pájaros de la noche se elevaron a la Luna.

‘Escucha, Osukuá, lo que venimos a decirte en gran secreto,’ cuchichearon a su oído. ‘Oú es un farsante, un fanfarrón. Se ha engreído al extremo de considerarse igual que Obatalá. Lleva su insolencia al punto de asegurarnos que es más blanco y puro que Obatalá, que finge a su costa la blancura. Como le envuelve de pies a cabeza, fácilmente se hace pasar por Obatalá y confunde a muchos, que le adoran creyendo que él es Obatalá y Obatalá es Oú. Los pájaros, que reverenciamos y queremos servir a nuestro Señor, los pájaros que cantamos: ‘Obatalá oro lilé Orisha eyeríbó Orolilé nisi obilé ribé Orisa Uón Obatalá Orililé’ desearíamos darle a Oú su merecido; pero ¡ay! Osukuá, nosotros somos débiles. En cambio tú eres grande, eres fuerte; todo está de noche a tu mandar. ¡Destruye en su sueño cuanto antes a Oú, el impostor.’ (1972: 69)

[Listen to how the Bird Gang schemed to make Oú disappear from the face of the earth the best way possible. The Night Birds went up to the Moon. ‘Listen,
Osukuá, to what we come to tell you in great secret,’ they whispered in his ear.

‘Oú is a fake, a braggart. He has even boasted to the point of considering himself equal to Obatalá. He carries his insolence so far as to tell us he is whiter and purer than Obatalá, who pretends to be white. As he covers himself from head to toe, he pretends he is Obatalá and confuses many, who adore him believing he is Obatalá and Obatalá is Oú. We birds, who revere and want to serve, sing:

‘Obatalá oro lilé Orisha eyeribó Orolilé nísi obilé ribé Orisa Uón Obatalá

Orililé’ would like to give Oú his due, but, oh!, Osukuá, we are weak! You, however, are great and strong, and at night everything is at your calling. Destroy the impostor Oú as soon as possible, while he is sleeping!’]. (1972: 69)

The dialogue, orality, characterizations and quotations of African words in this passage provide an overview of Afrocuban narrative. Eavesdropping on the birds and the moon invokes the supernatural just as much as it rehashes the human downfalls that plague the divinities. Once more, supernatural transcendence (visits to the moon, talking birds) coexists with petty human themes (greed, power) in a typical fable. And again, Cabrera’s redaction hinges upon oral language in its imitative efforts as put forth by the transcription of the birds’ songs. Notions of the fable dot the passage, as logic seems surpassed in an unsurprising presentation of seeming normalcy.

Arriving at the story’s explicative end, the tale now leaves ambiguous narrative for simple definitional conclusion, much as in Lachatañeré’s work. Just as it opened with basic explanations of Yoruba religious lore, “El algodón ciega a los pájaros” concludes with the same straightforwardness, as the narrator gets to the moral of the story: “Así se cumple por los siglos de los siglos la palabra de Obatalá, pues el pájaro ignorante, el desmemoriado – quizá temerario
That is how Obatalá’s word is followed over the centuries: the ignorant, forgetful, and perhaps frightened bird, hiding its irreverent beak in the sacred cotton, lost his sight and never flew again” (1972: 72-3). The bird is grounded once the orisha learns he has been duped, and the fable ends with the creatures’ downfall, which encases a basic tenet of Afrocuban lore: “how Obatalá’s word is followed over the centuries.” While a moral correlation to the nation could be drawn from the tale – we are in fact to equate revering deities with understanding and appreciating national heritage – this story seems to fit more simply into the category of fable. Whatever the genre, it is a prime example of how Cabrera captures the interplay between didactic/moral lesson and orality. Both foster the appreciation of a new literary manifestation of cubanidad. Indeed, Cabrera’s recourse of such concurrence in the remainder of the tales sets a standard for the Afrocuban narrative genre: fiction passes for a mimesis of oral lore. In invoking such premises, the tale leaves the reader immersed, aware of the ambiguity and the impossibility of the events narrated, with little or no textual aides for further deciphering. These are self-standing avant-garde artifacts whose only context is the racialized national scenario surrounding their advent.

If Lachatañeré’s manipulation of Afrocuban scholarship and narrative technique made Yemayá an Afrocuban literary mainstay, Cabrera’s cuentos propelled the documentary enterprise even further. In her Cuentos, she narrated Afrocuba in both observationally authentic and potentially nation-building terms. Her own later scholarship partook of the same positionality. From art to a perfect representation of the Afrocuban paradox, Cabrera, at her core, embodied the many sides of Afrocuban discourse, and demonstrates how the same academic and artistic
climates that engendered Carpentier’s *Ecué* propelled Afrocuban fictional narrative so far in so few years.

Afrocuban poetics

Afrocuba’s essayists who also dabbled in poetry were outspoken theorists on poetics. Ramón Guirao (1908-1944), Juan Marinello (1898-1977), and Emilio Ballagas (1908-1954), among others, composed essays that tackled such themes as the historical and artistic origins of Afrocuban poetic verse, the aesthetic and metaphorical richness of the African thematic, and the place of such poetry in world literature. It is important, however, not to allow such deceptively precise characterization to misguide us: these thinkers embodied the same paradox that encompassed Afrocuba’s fiction writers and scholars. Their commentary on poetics, however, is more compact, and makes for less divisive analytical distinction.

If Afrocuban poetry was the unifying theme of these writers’ collective corpus, then a quick glance reveals a capital omission in Nicolás Guillén (1902-1989). While Guirao, Marinello, and Ballagas purported to poeticize and theorize Afrocuba from the outside, Guillén did so from a personal, internal vantage point. The former, white academics, offered commentary on Afrocuban poetry from the standpoint of Afrocuba’s cultural richness – its attraction as viable poetry – and could not boast any personal feelings stemming from an Afrocuban life experience. That is, they valued African inspiration for its aesthetic promise as art, and their writing contemplated historical themes and stylistic nuances all the while participating in a distinct brand of nation-building from a distance. For this reason, our considerations of Guillén’s work are brief and separate; treating the work of the four thinkers as a monolithic discourse would muddle the scenario with too many contradictions, while Guillén’s
lived mulatto experience embodies many of the quandaries associated with Afrocuba’s paradoxes. The three white thinkers deserve further separate consideration when scrutinizing Guirao’s and Ballagas’s common undertaking: the Afrocuban poetic anthology. Indeed, the anthology was an important mainstay of the Afrocuban archival enterprise, for it was a self-contextualizing documentary sampling that endeavored at artistic catalog, and in so doing, proclaimed the formation of an Afrocuban literary canon that could be sustainable among national artistic currents. The resonance of such anthologies with Afrocuban scholarship should be clear: the latter’s advent was a later manifestation of the *archivo*, the very bibliographic symbol drawn upon by Afrocuba’s examiners in the preceding decade. Again, non-Afrocubans made every effort to create “Afrocuban literature,” teaching it to the nation, though each went about it in different ways. Essayists and poets tackled different scholarship/art approaches and played the role of both in the nation-building process by means of sundry tactics. Recall our designation of Afrocuba’s artists and thinkers as positioning themselves along spectral loci, the result being that no two thinkers rest in the same position. Again, our intent here is exploratory, speculative, for as we shall see, this side of the Afrocuban machine upholds many of the same issues that characterized the scientific and fictional ventures.

**JUAN MARINELLO**

In *Poética: ensayos en entusiasmo* [*Poetics: Essays in Enthusiasm*] (1933), Juan Marinello predates the later discussions of his poetic colleagues with a string of essays that analyze the poetic process, what he deems as “meditaciones sobre el hecho lírico” [“meditations on the lyric act”] (13). In “Negrismo y mulatismo” [“Negrism and Mulattism”], the one essay dedicated to the Afrocuban cause, Marinello meditated on the transplant of such poetic
techniques in the ever-racialized Republican art scene. He thereby blurs art/nation margins and meditates at length on their interplay in the Afrocuban poetic process. He identifies the spiritual benefits of national healing inherent to the artful portrayal of Cuba’s Africans: “Al cuajar el mestizaje estético diremos cubanamente,… Habremos integrado entonces, con nuestra expresión profunda, un espíritu peculiar, distinto. Al exprimirmos ese espíritu rezumaremos un jugo de presencias blancas y negras definitivamente maridades” [“Upon the aesthetic mestizaje’s so-called Cuban setting,… We will have then integrated, with our deep expression, a peculiar, distinct, spirit. Upon squeezing out such a spirit, we will ooze a juice of definitively joined black and white presences”] (112). By way of insight that heralds Ortiz’ theses in El engaño de las razas (1946), Marinello calls for the spiritual integration of Cuba’s various populations. As his language surmises the inseparability of Cuba’s ethnicities, the “spiritual” demarcation is key. “Oozing” and blending occur on all fronts – social, political, biological, and artistic – as Marinello does not speak of intimately joined blacks and whites, but rather “black and white presences.” Consonant with Ballagas and Guirao – and, indeed, with Ortiz – Marinello points to the “deep expression” involved with Cuba’s plural heritage.

Marinello is the figure that perhaps makes the nation/art nexus most explicit: “Los poetas de Cuba… tienen una responsabilidad profunda, que cumplir: dar al continente el canto negro en su angustia presente y en la anticipación iluminada de su destino. Ninguna tierra guarda como la nuestra las posibilidades de esa obra de arte y de humanidad. Aquí lo negro es tuétano y raíz, aliento de pueblo, música acatada, irrepresible impulso” [“Cuba’s poets… have a deep duty to fulfill: to give the continent the black chant in its present anguish and in the enlightened anticipation of its destiny. No land better than Cuba owns the possibilities of such a work of art and humanity. Here the black is bone marrow and root, the people’s breath; revered music,
irrepressible impulse”] (141-142). The charge is clear in its position of the African at the heart of Cuban matters. Correspondingly, Marinello designates “the black” with such metaphors as “bone marrow,” “root,” and “breath,” a lyricism that dons “un quilate que no puede ni simularse ni imitarse” [“a carat that can be neither simulated nor faked”] (142). Marinello’s model for such “carat” is Nicolás Guillén. Duno observes that Marinello favored Guillén’s work for its language: “no sorprende que Marinello celebre la obra de Guillén por contribuir a formar un ‘lenguaje cubano’ que busca integrar lo negro y lo hispánico en una nueva síntesis” [“it is not surprising that Marinello celebrates Guillén’s work because it contributes to the formation of a ‘Cuban language’ that seeks to integrate the black and the Hispanic into a new synthesis”] (Duno 2003: 105). The “new synthesis,” as conveyed through Guillén’s well-known invocation of inherently mulatto – “Cuban” – language, is what Marinello considers the essence of Afrocuban poetry. Marinello’s recognition of the “destiny” of Afrocubans – a future that overcomes present social maladies – fuses spiritual outlook with aesthetic reverence for Guillén’s unmatched poetry. Moreover, Marinello’s overt consonance with national issues – specifically, the place of Afrocuban culture appreciation within a healthy nation – readily echoes Ortiz’s archival precepts.

RAMÓN GUIRAO

Ramón Guirao perplexes. The white anthologist instigated a genre with “Bailadora de Rumba” [“Rumba Dancer”] (1928), and in di Leo’s words Guirao “ocupa la rara posición de haber escrito lo que se considera el primer poema afrocubano, ‘Bailadora de rumba,’ publicado en el suplemento literario del Diario de la Marina el 8 de abril de 1928, y la antología del mismo movimiento en 1938, seguida, al igual que en la prosa o el ensayo científico, de un vocabulario”
[Guirao “occupies the rare position of having written what is considered to be the first Afrocuban poem, ‘Rumba Dancer,’ published in the literary supplement Diario de la Marina on 8 April 1928, and an anthology of the same movement in 1938, followed, just as in prose or scientific essays, by a vocabulary”] (86). What di Leo classifies as a “rare position” supports Afrocuban literature’s vexed makeup: it should not be startling that a white poet, anthologist, and bibliophile should have participated in the beginnings of Afrocuban verse. This is a problematic statement by many measures. Remember that the nineteenth-century Romantic Afrocuban poets Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés (Plácido) and Juan Francisco Manzano can equally make the same claim. Though in no way equitable to Afrocuban poetic heavyweight Guillén, Guirao’s pioneering role is important to any discussion of Afrocuban poetry. If Guillén’s adoption of Afrocuban style (e.g. musical poetic rhythm, imitations of Afrocuban speech) donned him authority, Guirao was strained and unnatural in his preference of Western poetics over Afrocuban ones. It is perhaps fitting that his first poem bore irreconcilable stylizations of African and non-African modes. But what Guirao lacked in authenticity he made up for in keen national consciousness and overt attempts at intercalating lo afrocubano into national ideals.

Guirao went on to impart such national attention in a small narrative collection – Cuentos y leyendas negras de Cuba [Stories and Black Legends of Cuba] (1942) – in which he postscripted his poetic efforts by anthologizing a handful of brief lore pieces.149 While the stories,

149 We include the table of contents here:
“Prólogo”
“La lechuza y el mono”
“Obatalá y Orula”
“La leyenda de Icú”
“Las orejas del conejo”
“Siquillángama”
“Cuento de ambecó y aguatí”
“La música y el caimán”
whose connection with Cabrera is clear, represent a narrative contribution to Afrocuba, their
formulaic nature, brevity, and likeness to those pieces in Archivos preclude discussion here.
They not only achieved the same effect as their Archivos predecessors, but many of the
contributors were the same, such as Herminio Portell Vilá and Fernando Ortiz. Guirao also
included three of his own short tales. The collection’s short prologue put forth nationalist fervor:
“Esta falta de curiosidad por toda manifestación propia del hombre negro, ha motivado que no
contemos con un acopio valioso de leyendas, cuentos, fábulas y mitos. En la presente antología
recogemos un muestrario representativo de la tradición oral, salvándolo de su posible olvido”
[“This lack of curiosity for every natural black manifestation has allowed us to collect numerous
legends, stories, fables, and myths. In the present anthology we gather a representative sampling
of the oral tradition, saving it from its possible forgetting”] (1942: 5). Guirao declared that
Afrocuban traditions were in danger of being lost, and his compilation thus upheld documentary
ideals likened to Ortiz’s folklorist efforts. Such anthologizing efforts entailed aspirations that
sought to maintain Afrocuba’s centrality among concepts of national culture. Guirao’s remarks
cemented his general impetus: whether through poetry, essay, or folkloric shorts, he was bent on
documenting Afrocuba and compelling the nation to embrace such heritage as national.

“El baile de la lechuza”
“La jicotea y el perro”
“El tigre, el mono y la venado”
“El pitirre y el cotunto”
“La leyenda del Güije”
“Cuento del Jigüe”
“La jicotea y el sapo”
“El mono, la monita y el garbancito”
“El negro que tumbó una ceiba”
“La tre barra e joro”
“Mi Seño mío Jesucristo”
“Papelito jabla lengua”
“¡Maylrá no macca anduyo!”
“Vocabulario”
Although Guillén met greater success at evoking national race issues in his verse, Guirao’s poetry, poetic commentary, and short-lived experiments with Afrocuban narrative reveal both alignment and misalignment with Ortiz’s nationalist goals. Guirao introduces his Afrocuban poetry anthology, Órbita de la poesía afrocubana [On Afrocuban Poetry] (1938), with a significant prologue essay that explored the thinking of such non-Afrocuban literates toward their preferred African thematic. The prologue was much more developed than the leyendas lead-in, and overt Ortiz connections were expounded upon by Guirao’s focus on Afrocuba’s artistic, poetic, processes. Though national issues were addressed, they appeared through the lens of such artistic meditations. We shall examine much of the essay shortly, though a preliminary glance at the text, and a concurrent examination of two of Guirao’s own poems, provides a useful introduction to our discussion of the Afrocuban poetic phenomenon and the other figures discussed in this section.

Guirao’s Órbita prologue specifies the road toward mulatto Cuba as it outlays the staples of full-fledged poetics. The collection presents a sampling of Afrocuban verse, from Manzano through Guirao himself, with short introductory commentary on each poet’s work, and the customary glossary. The prologue itself addresses the historical and classification issues surrounding Afrocuban verse, as well as offering insight on the locus, role, and task of Afrocuba’s versed portrayer. Guirao points to the initial “larval” stages of the Afrocuban genre: “en el umbral de esta antología de poetas que han cultivado el tema negroide, quiero decir, que han realizado poesía negra, la existencia de una lírica en formación o estado larval, cuya esencia no podemos tan siquiera intuir, y que ha de quedarnos como fermento útil del cultivo afanoso, durante el término de diez años, de la poesía afrocubana” [“on the threshold of this anthology of poets that have cultivated the Negroid theme, that is, that have created black poetry, the existence
of a forming lyric, still in a larval state, whose essence we can only intuit, and that should remain for us a useful facilitator of Afrocuban poetry’s laborious cultivation during these ten years”] (XI). Though in just ten years “laborious cultivation” has created “black poetry,” the anthologist still considers his compilation as a “facilitator.” To his mind, Afrocuban poetry is of “honda resonancia continental” [“deep continental resonance”], a delineation that upholds prerogatives of Afrocuban culture transmission while situating the genre in larger, international artistic currents (XI). Guirao’s statement could also be inferred as either a desire to etch out an international following for Afrocuba or else a a challenge for Cubans to treat “black poetry” as a significant source of national pride. Further remarks address Afrocuban questions more directly: “se intenta propagar, movido de la necesidad de que la población negra y mestiza participe responsablemente de este momento crítico, que la poética afronegrista, esto es, de tema negro, es la más genuina manifestación de nuestra sensibilidad insular” [“moved by the black and mulatto populations’ necessity to participate responsibly in this critical moment, Afrocuban poetics are intended to propagate the most genuine manifestation of our insular heritage”] (XII). Praising Afrocuban poetics for its authenticity, Guirao also weighs the genre for its inclusion of blacks and mulattoes. It would seem as though he genuinely attempts to embrace a mulatto envisioning of Cuba, one that integrally seeks its own blacks. Such ideal is fascinating if one takes into account Guirao’s own ethnicity: the white ‘founder’ of contemporary Afrocuban verse wishes his genre to be an undertaking of Cuba’s mulattoes and blacks – Afrocuban perplexity at its best.

Language is the conceptual focus of Guirao’s Afrocuban discourse. “El modo negro…

no nace en Cuba como en Europa, sin tradición y alejado del documento humano. Tiene perspectiva histórica y un futuro indefinible la lírica bilingüe de español y dialectos africanos, y puede, hermanada a la sensibilidad criolla, integrar la gran poesía vernácula de que hablamos”
[“The black mode… is not born in Cuba as it is in Europe, without tradition and distanced from human documentation. African and Spanish bilingual lyrics have an undefineable future, and they can, coupled with Creole sensibility, embrace the great vernacular poetry that we spoke of”] (XIX-XX). That is, his poems are Afrocuban for their linguistic inclusions – exclamations that mirror Afrocuban speech. Specificity such as this distinguishes Guirao’s verse from Carpentier’s markedly looser novelistic observation. Guirao makes clear his premise is compactly linguistic and makes no claims at poeticizing the entire Afrocuban experience. Carpentier's characterization of Menegildo was lacking in precision for its overzealous attempts at capturing an Afrocuban worldview; Guirao’s election of poetic subjects is narrower and, consequently, less daunting. In a crucial limit to his method, Guirao introduces a key conceptual technique into his poetic scheme: imitated Afrocuban speech and ritual language must be coupled with a “Creole sensibility,” a reliance upon white/Creole poetics and Western versification which in turn infuses poetry with black and white bisemic focalizations of African subjects and Western poetics. A “Creole sensibility” thus guides descriptions of Afrocubans from outside; brief dialogued exclamations attempt to capture Africanness from within. Practically speaking, such unmediated juxtaposition wants for harmony, as one gets the overriding sensation that African snippets are haphazardly inserted into Western verse without any seeming homogeneity. Just as the worlds of Carpentier’s narrator and characters jarred the narrative with their disjointedness, the closeness of the two patois in Guirao’s “Bailadora” sparks a linguistic mayhem-of sorts, a trait which could be a nexus with avant-garde poetics. The seemingly random insertion of a disjointed element could be a rudimentary attempt to invoke the avant-garde (and Surrealist) formula for the marvelous image. Guirao does not set out to do more than capture pieces of

150 Such tactics are made evident by Pierre Reverdy and Vicente Huidobro in their creacionismo. Guirao was probably familiar with their work.
Afrocuban language, and “Bailadora” is, if nothing else, a start. It retains a style akin to “Creole sensibility” and embraces an African thematic only through its inclusion of scant Afrocuban speech.\textsuperscript{151}

“Bailadora de rumba” (1928)

Bailadora de guaguancó
piel negra,
tesura de bongó.  
Agita la maraca de su risa
con los dedos de leche
de sus dientes.  
Pañuelo rojo
—seda—,  
bata blanca
—almidón—,  
recorren el trayecto
de una cuerda
en un ritmo afrocubano
de
  guitarra,  
  clave  
y cajón.  
‘¡Arriba, María Antonia,  
  alabao sea Dió!’  
Las serpientes de sus brazos
van soltando las cuentas
de un collar de jabón.  (1970: 53)

All but the mimicked quotation invoke “Creole sensibility” and present the \textit{afrocubana} subject via Western markers. Instead of modeling the poem’s versification after rhythmic ritual, the poem invokes Afrocuba explicitly and intermittently: “en un ritmo afrocubano” [“in an Afrocuban rhythm”], “piel negra” [“black skin”]. Blatant delineations struggle, without success, to present Afrocuba from the inside, and the poem does not necessarily sound rhythmical. It

\textsuperscript{151} Due to translational difficulties and textual intricacies, we have decided to forego English translations of poems cited in this study. However, when specific portions are cited in our textual analysis an approximate English translation will be provided. Note how only one such “imitation” – “Dió” – appears.
declares itself to be so. And while the short lines and hyperbaton cause the poem to progress rhythmically from verse to verse, it is still missing the key rhythmic signifiers that will become the staple of Guillén’s poetry – chanted anaphora, estribillos, onomatopoeic resonance, pulsed exclamations. Thus the poem’s language leans towards a “Creole” rather than Afrocuban, sensibility. Guirao’s previous comments revealed that his observational prerogative was limited linguistically, but one could have inferred from his musings that his poetry was significant in its inclusion of Afrocuban idioms. Aside from “guaguancó,” the poem’s sole Afrocuban linguistic offering, “alabao sea Dió,” modifies standard Spanish only narrowly. In terms of position (a frequent measuring stick of the narrative works presented in this chapter), Guirao’s Afrocuba is decidedly focalized from the outside. Keeping with the tenor of Carpentier’s narrator, the Afrocuban subject is objectified by a distant viewer. Guirao’s own language stipulations, likewise, stunt his own cause even further, as his reliance upon “Creole sensibility” only upholds this positionality. This first work did not match Guirao’s own standard.

“Canto negro de ronda” [“black Chant in a Round”] (1931) does rectify such shortfalls. Here Guirao abandons previous bisemic treatments to infuse the poem with multiple linguistic traditions. Its sensibilidad criolla introduces the poetic scenario, while ritual exclamations and imitated Afrocuban ritual dialogues ascribe to witnessing a poetic experience. The poet’s reliance upon language keeps with his original intent, but the exclamations and dialogue of the poem make up for a different poem:

“Canto negro de ronda” (1931)

¡Quiquiriquíí!

Los caminos
de alas grises
en el Oriente
se esconden
¡Quiquiriquíii!
—¡Jongolojongo del Rey Congo, mi puchunguito: quita manito, cabeza e guayo, que la gayo ba picá a ti!
¡Quiquiriquíii!
—¡Ba pica a ti, nengrito! Quiquiriquí, Conguito quiquiriquíi. ¡Babalú pa mí!

Juxtaposing sensibilidad criolla with Afrocuban speech traits, Guirao leaves us with a poem that should be read aloud. He has surpassed his initial plunge into Afrocuban poetry and lives up to the aspirations of his prologue. In terms of language, imitative exclamations (¡Quiquiriquíii!) punctuate Spanish poetic descriptions (“Los caminos / de alas grises / en el Oriente / se esconden / sin preguntas / de haciadónde” [“The roads / of grey wings / in the East / hid themselves / without questions / of to where”]) and segments of Afrocuban dialogue. Symmetrical stanzas and short verses keep the poem moving, and enunciate a steady beat, while the African imitations boast rhythmic, musical, and even instrumental syllabification – i.e., “Jongolojongo,” etc. The poem need not declare itself as rhythmic, for the short verses connote an unmistakable
flow. Guirao’s work evokes Afrocuban language just as it reiterates Afrocuban rhythm. Even a quick glance is sufficient to note the stifled preference for sensibilidad criolla over Afrocuban stylization. In contrast with “Bailadora de rumba,” the speaker’s position lies squarely within Afrocuba. The distance of his “Bailadora”’s speaker is left for the exclamations of Afrocubans themselves, not Western descriptions of them. Guirao’s nationally conscious poetry perfects his own verse and surpasses his own delineations in a quest to “embrace the great vernacular poetry” of Afrocuban verse (XX).

EMILIO BALLAGAS

Whereas Ortiz set out to document Afrocuba, Guirao, (the short narrative leyendas aside) sought to refine the use of Afrocuban language in the fledgling poetics. We shall return in a moment to the heart of Guirao’s prologue essay; we will see just how deeply he meditated on the subject within a para-Cuban framework. The next logical step in our reading is Emilio Ballagas, the poet and anthologist who made much effort at contemplating and collecting Afrocuban verse with an overarching goal of situating that verse within its Latin American canon. His first collection of poetry, Cuaderno de poesía negra [Booklet of Black Poetry] (1934), included twelve of his own poems and a brief vocabulary. A lengthier collection, Antología de poesía negra hispanoamericana [Anthology of Spanish American Black Poetry] (1935) included several works by various authors, the customary vocabulary, and short bio-bibliographical sketches on the contributors. In an introductory essay on the stylistic richness of Afrocuban poetics, Ballagas proclaimed that his earlier anthology was meant to “revelar poetas [y] manifestar los diversos
matics que pueden darse dentro del verso negro, destruyendo así la especie, muy exagerada, de que la poesía negra es monótona” [“reveal poets and bring to light the diverse hues found within black verse, thereby destroying the quite exaggerated rumor that black poetry is monotonous”] (1935: 32). If Guirao had sidestepped blatant social considerations surrounding Afrocubans for a purely artistic treatment of Afrocuban poetics, Ballagas followed suit: he clarified that his intention was to point to the artistic richness of Afrocuban poetry, condemning a “monotonous,” that is, not artistically viable, “exaggerated rumor.”

Ballagas’ third anthology, *Mapa de la poesía negra americana* [*Map of Black American Verse*] (1946), is most useful for understanding both the place and the perceived purpose of Afrocuban verse. His opening remarks are definitional in the sense that they reveal his conceptual approach to Afrocuban/African verse. Upon disclosing his concept of “black poetry,” he offers a clear nexus to the racialized climate surrounding Afrocuban discourse: “no se trata aquí de poesía negra en toda su pureza, mitología y originalidad africana… sino de poesía de contraste y asimilación de culturas” [“we are not dealing with black poetry in terms of purity, mythology, and African originality… but rather poetry of cultural contrast and assimilation”] (1946: 8). His remarks encase the very cultural processes cognizant of Afrocuban arts, and his treatment of culture ahead of artistic practice reveals meditation on the role of such poetry within the national Afrocuban ethos. Surpassing a merely artistic rubric, Ballagas clarified that he was more concerned with the cultural relationships that backdrop Africanized verse. “Presentamos aquí una suma de poesía afroamericana y el rasgo distintivo de ésta es el ser un arte de relación, poesía negra con referencia blanca, o poesía de blancos referida al negro y a su peculiaridad americana” [“We offer here a sampling of Afro-American poetry and its distinctive feature is that it is an art of relation, black poetry with white reference, or white poetry referring to the
black and its American peculiarities”] (1946: 9). Epitomizing the very problems at the core of Guirao’s verse, Ballagas made no aims at reconciliation; in fact, he deemed it impossible. His concern rested upon delineating the “art of relation” that ensues when one culture represents another. This constituted a prime recognition of the surrounding cultural scenarios piloting the Cuban reception of African verse. In a position possibly diminishing to art, Ballagas evoked quasi-documentary ideals – “art of relation” – and thereby indirectly aligned with Afrocuban nation-building. Before grappling with the universal issues surrounding the aesthetic drives of Africanized poetry, he concerned himself with the American continents. This, too, was a significant move, for Ballagas’ momentary evasion of the other formative influences on black arts refuted Europe, Afrocuban art’s ostensible birthplace. Recall Guirao’s insight to the effect that “Nuestra poesía afrocriolla es un eco de la moda negra europea: consecuencia más que iniciativa propia” [“Our Afro-Creole poetry is an echo of black European fashion; a consequence more than an initiation”] (1970: XXII). Ballagas’ own recognition of “American peculiarities” constituted a cultural rather than an artistic meditation in its denial of the European origin of the avant-garde. It remains clear that Ballagas was concerned, first and foremost, with black Latin American social issues and the transmission of such cultures to wider audiences.

No sooner does Ballagas treat Afrocuban verse in artistic terms: “Hay dentro de la poesía mulata motivos de estética universal; alusiones al drama de la esclavitud; al conflicto de sangres en el mulato; a la plasticidad formal de la mujer negra, o a la sensual y sorprendente belleza de la mulata. Estos motivos en las mejores ocasiones aparecen expresados en la lengua correspondiente sin exageradas deformaciones idiomáticas o en pulcra elocución universal” [“Inside mulatto poetry there are motives of universal aesthetics; allusions to the slavery drama; to the conflict of bloods in the mulatto; to the formal plasticity of the black woman or the mulatto
woman’s sensual and surprising beauty. These motives, at their best, appear expressed in a corresponding language without exaggerated idiomatic deformations or in a polished, universal, language”] (1946: 11). Ballagas deems that the very aesthetic “motives” that Afrocuban artists should try to glean from their work exist already in “mulatto poetry;” they are historical (“slavery”), cultural (“conflict of bloods”), and aesthetic (“sensual,” “beauty”), and speak to the African’s spontaneous poetics. In that true African poetry posits such traits “without deforming exaggerations” of mulatto poetic language, the poet’s task is to capture such ethos while offering aesthetically pleasing work. The instructions for Afrocuba’s poetry aficionados thus hinges upon the very archival precepts that guided so many others, artists and scientists alike, toward Afrocuba: the Afrocuban, the mulatto, should be presented as is, without mediations. He is naturally poetic. Afrocuba is, at once, dramatic, conflictive, and beautiful. The evocation of nation-building, albeit veiled, not only resonates with academic treatises on Afrocuba. It also calls for first-hand documentation of Cuba’s Africans as a mechanism diluting racial tension. As such, Afrocuban poetics, when not constrained to portraying Africans along “deforming” lines, allows the nation to revisit the very issues Ballagas brings to light. History, slavery, cultural-mixing processes, and expositions of mulatto language are the thematic contexts driving such “universal aesthetics”: for Ballagas, these tangible realities enrich Afrocuban artistic expression and summon national healing.

Duno regards Ballagas as an incongruous figure that embodies “la convicción de la existencia de una autoría multiétnica dentro del negrismo, la cual permitiría hablar a cualquiera desde la interioridad del negro. Se conforma así una estrategia que presupone la expresión de sectores subalternos gracias al impulso redentor o a la sensibilidad del letrado” [“the conviction of the existence of multiethnic authors within negrismo, which would permit any one to speak
from within the black. A strategy is thus offered that presupposes the expresión of subaltern sectors, thanks to the redemptive impulse of the ‘sensibility’ of the lettered one”] (2003: 93). The statement is especially insightful when we measure it against all that Ballagas purported in the above passage. Regardless of the national goals of his own poetry and essays, Ballagas maintained the outsider position so chronic to Afrocuban Studies, as in the following poem.

“Rumba”

La negra
emerge de la olaespuma
de su bata de algodón.
En la sangre de la negra
sube, baja y arde el ron.

El ombligo de la negra
es vórtice de un ciclón.
El ombligo es vórtice.
El vientre es ciclón.
¡Las anchas caderas
y su pañolón!

El ombligo de la negra
en la sandunga se abrió
fijo como un ojo impar
para mirar a Changó.” (1946: 129)

“Rumba” partakes of an outsider’s position in relation to the Afrocuban dance and dancer. We follow the observer’s eyes over the various parts of the negra’s body as he crafts a series of easy-to-follow metaphors, such as the “hurricane’s eye” in the dancer’s “bellybutton” and the “stormy chest.” As in Guirao’s similarly titled poem, the focalizer’s position as an Afrocuban insider is thwarted by a string of distanced invocations/descriptors of the Afrocuban. That the dancer’s description is realized “from the outside” capitalizes on Duno’s previous insight (Miller 25). The Afrocuban artistic venue allots a position that is not inherently theirs, and we have seen the varying degrees to which Afrocuba’s letrados capitalize on the insider position for aesthetic
results. Therein lies what Duno views as “las profundas contradicciones que encarna el proyecto de representación de la voz negra dentro de la cultura nacional cubana” [“the profound contradictions that the project of representing the black voice engenders within Cuban national culture”] (2003: 89). 152 We have identified, over the course of each of Afrocuban Studies’ moments, assorted contradictions. Ballagas’ poem is no exception. But Ballagas’ aforementioned remarks make these lines take on a larger context in that his recognition of Afrocubans’ social and historical situation – a recognition that goes above and beyond mere artistic treatment – augments the scope of this poem.

Ballagas embraces, by way of his nationally conscious deliberations, the artistic theme by positing that the national racial setup constitutes an “adventurous” turn to African arts: “la poesía mulata ha dado muestras muy estimables dentro del arte popular y del arte culto. Por todas estas consideraciones de mestizaje e interculturación; de vitalidad y lirismo, los poemas… [representan] un momento y acaso una necesidad de la poesía americana; una aventura hacia otro acento; no un modo único” [“mulatto poetry has given esteemable indications within popular and culto art. Taken with these considerations of mestizaje and interculturación; of vitality and lyricism, the poems… represent a moment and perhaps a need for American poetry; an adventure towards another accent; not a unique mode”] (1946: 13). The Republican state of affairs had deemed Afrocuban arts a “necessity,” a natural result of the process of mestizaje and of what Ballagas coins (echoing Ortiz) as interculturación. Observe how Ballagas insists again on coupling issues of art and nation. If such resolve exemplifies the overlapping reaches of Afrocuba’s many discursive processes, deeming Africanized poetry as an inevitable “art of relation” surely constitutes a bold statement. We return to Guirao’s prologue in Orbita for a

152 Duno explicates a portion of this same poem (2003: 92).
fuller understanding of the magnitude of such a statement: “El arte europeo necesita recibir influencias vitales, externas” (1970: XIV). Not only is African-American poetry a “necessity” for America; it is essential for European poetics as well. For, as Guirao put it,

Hemos adquirido la mercancía oscura en otros mercados estéticos… sin percatarnos de nuestra realidad negra. Cuando averiguamos que por lo local se desemboca a lo universal, intentamos investigar las posibilidades líricas del hombre de piel tiznada. La modalidad afroantillana ha dado sus más cuajados frutos en Cuba porque contamos con el documento humano vivo, presente, racial y económicamente en nuestros destinos históricos. Con la aparición del negrismo se establece entre nosotros una corriente de simpatías, un ligamento, que nos lleva a una introspección más cabal, amplia y profunda del alma negra. (1970: XVIII).

[We have acquired the black product’s merchandise in other aesthetic markets… without coming to grips with our black reality. When we ascertain that the local flows into the universal, we try to investigate the lyric possibilities of the man of colors. The Afro-Antillean mode has given its most gelled results in Cuba because we boast the actual living human document, racially and economically in our own historical destinies. With the appearance of negrismo a current of sympathies is established among us, a glue that brings us to a more consummate, wide, and deep introspection into the black soul]. (1970: XVIII)

Guirao makes clear that the Cuban has discovered the African in “other aesthetic markets” without truly understanding it. His critique of the particulars of the artistic movement – e.g. the appropriation of the Afrocuban thematic into broader currents in world art – betrays the privilege
of those who coexist with the “Afro-Antillean” mode. Calling upon rhetoric that mirrors the numerous bibliographic symbols we have seen employed over Afrocuban Studies’ maturity, Guirao, not unlike Cabrera, views Antillean Africans as “documents”: sources who do much more than spur aesthetically and thematically enriched arts. The “destinies” contained in such living “documents” – historical, present, racial, economic, etc. – are the vehicles through which Cubans get to know the depths of their own soul. If Ballagas contended that Africanized verse hinged upon certain cultural groups relating the experiences of other cultural groups, and such a process partook of the complexities inbuilt to those groups while garnering equal aesthetic force, Guirao goes a step further by imploring that Cubans partake of a “deep introspection into the black soul” to etch out even ampler forms of culture learning. In the process, Guirao clarifies there is no place for prejudice in Afrocuban artistic representation: “El prejuicio contra los negros es sólo social. Nunca artístico” [“The prejudice against blacks is only social; never artistic”] (1970: XXI). Even if Guirao writes from a poetic standpoint, such recognition of the extramural cultural melee – and its racial discord – is a major statement on behalf of Afrocuban art.

We have seen so far how Ballagas and Guirao go to-and-fro between ideals of nation and ideals of art. Guirao, in addition to his remarks concerning the nation cited here, also muses at length about the artistic goings-on surrounding Afrocuban poetry. Invoking figures from Mallarmé to Lorca, Whitman to Manzano, his observations on the nation are equaled – if not surpassed – by commentary that remains linked to poetic practice. That is to say, the passages applicable to nation-building cited here should not imply that the Órbita essay is fully tied to Afrocuban issues in the Republic; much of his argument is poetic and, in some ways, ignores African matters. The significant insight in these passages has shown how, no matter the apparent
reliance on pure poetics, the very nature of these years in the Republic’s art forms precludes a divorce of art and nation. In one passage Guirao seems to drift away from national musings; in another he takes issue with multiple matters of race, race relations, and observation on Afrocuban cultures. The same could be said of Ballagas, whose “national” treatise is dampened in every respect when one considers the “American” continent in the thrust of his argument. Ballagas’ 1946 anthology deals with African-American poetics. From each of his statements we have inferred a connection from continent to nation. Such indistinctness notwithstanding, each has shown us – in theory and in practice – his own approach to Afrocuba and his efforts at broadcasting that approach for the purposes of disseminating Afrocuban art.

NICOLÁS GUILLÉN

Afrocuban poetry’s most acclaimed member, Nicolás Guillén donned a mulatto heritage, political sway, and poetic talent that made him an influential cultural vehicle. Guillén’s richness lay in longevity. He was one of the few Afrocuban figures in which one could study changes based upon differing contexts and ideologies over a seventy-year career. Although the sum total of his poetics and his status in the critical canon surpass the scope of this study, we would be remiss to leave him unmentioned. At the same time, it is well beyond our reach to offer an exhaustive reading of Guillén’s pertinence to Afrocuba.

Benítez-Rojo’s landmark study contextualizes Guillén’s work among its socially-conscious poetic precursors, among them Agustín Acosta’s La zafra [The Harvest] (1926). It is not surprising that Benítez-Rojo’s analysis gets quickly to representational constructs of Afrocuba, the first of which highlight mulatto sexuality. “Guillén,” he states, “not only reveals the Negro’s imprisonment within the plantation, but he also wishes to impregnate society with
the Negro’s libido – his own libido – transgressing the mechanisms of sexual censorship that the
Plantation imposed on his race. [We] see the setting up of a representation of neo-African
beauty that defies and desacralizes the canons of classical beauty” (123). Premises of social
activism cannot, however, be divorced from Guillén’s poetry; his representational mechanisms
frequently call upon grim expositions of Afrocuban social issues. As a result, Benítez-Rojo
remarks that Guillén sought to mend racial hostilities in his verse. “Guillén’s desire, the
inclusive desire of the Caribbean Negro within a reality restricted by racism, is disseminated
along with the rhythm of popular song, and becomes, through the political economy of ritual, the
desire of all, the desire of a nationality without racial conflict” (125). Mirroring Ortiz’s later
motivations, “Guillén desired a Cuba that was mulata; that is, a form of nationality that would
resolve the deep racial and cultural conflicts by means of a reduction or synthesis that flowed
from the proposal of a creole myth; that is, the mestizo reality understood as ‘unity,’ not as a
sheaf of different and coexistent dynamics” (126).

Benítez-Rojo’s insight pinpoints the poetic stylizations that separate Guillén from Guirao
and Ballagas. Guirao offered mulata poetry inasmuch as it presented coexisting Afrocuban and
Creole counterparts (recall the sensibilidad criolla and infrequent “Afrocuban” inclusions in
“Bailadora”). Guillén’s poetic drive, on the other hand, seeks conversely to present mulatto
Cuba as a “unity,” though this in no way implies a complete alignment with Ortiz’s “mulatto
nation” cause. Instead of relying on differentiations between blacks and whites, Guillén’s
poetics render Afrocuba as an achieved transcultured reality rather than a mediated juxtaposition.
The difference from the academy’s position is straightforward: while Ortiz operated in a largely
scientific, research plane (though some of his texts possess unmistakable literary influences),
Guillén was more concerned with art. The result is arguably the most accurate of Afrocuban portrayals.\footnote{It is also somewhat imprudent to analyze Guillén’s work outside of larger artistic contexts. Though he was a social voice for mulattoes and an active promoter of Afrocubanismo, his artistic endeavors sprung from an avant-garde context. Along these lines, the New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics observes that “Guillén was above the polemics of the avant garde. He created a powerful poetic movement that became characteristic of the Caribbean world. With Guillén, black poetry ceased to be an exotic pastime to become the expression of an oppressed people struggling for social liberation. Guillén’s poetry is not just ‘political;’ it is great art that combines the refined intricacies of old Spanish ballads with the fascinating rhythms and cadences of African music and dance” (1193).}

It goes without saying that political causes are much more visible in Guillén. Guirao divulged less political meditations and social concerns in his poetry, as his essays emphasized social plight from a historical perspective – for example, his long meditation in Órbita on slavery revolving around his discussion of Manzano – and how Afrocuban art should not be influenced by non-artistic racial prejudice, an idea Ballagas embraced as well. To repeat, Guillén’s artistic longevity engendered an ideologically developed poetic reading of Afrocuba. Aside from dealing with “problems of culture, history, nationality, and the plantation in the Caribbean” (133), he subsumed the communist cause fervently hoping “for a proletarian revolution” (131). Regardless of the context, Íñigo Madrigal reminds us that “[e]l universalismo de la poesía de Guillén reside, fundamentalmente, en su carácter popular. Desde Motivos de son el cubano hace de lo popular el elemento axial de su poética y, lo que es más singular, lo hace de modo programático y sistemático” [“[t]he universalism of Guillén’s poetry resides fundamentally in his popular character. From Motivos de son on, the poet makes the popular the axial element of his poetics, and, clearly, he does so in a programmatic and systematic manner”] (18).

Guillén articulated his take on Afrocuba in his preface to Sóngoro cosongo (1931). “La inyección africana en esta tierra es tan profunda, y se cruza y entrecruza en nuestra bien regada...
hidrografía social tantas corrientes capilares, que sería trabajo de miniaturista desenredar el jeroglífico” [“The African injection into this land is so deep, and so many capillary currents cross and crisscross in our well-watered social hydrograph, that it would take a miniaturist to untangle the hieroglyph”] (1995: 96). His point is simple but crucial. Recognizing the futility of sifting through Cuba’s ethnic heritage, a truly “hieroglyphic” enterprise in and of itself, Guillén opts for a definition of cubanidad that considers the entirety of Cuba’s races as an indivisible compendium. But, as should be clear by now, compendium or not, contradictions abound. In Duno’s words, “Surge entonces la visión de una Cuba inmovilizada por contradicciones fundamentales” [“The vision of Cuba is thereby immobilized by fundamental contradictions”] (2003: 105). Ballagas, Guirao, and Marinello partake of the same notion when they designate African spirituality, natural beauty, depth, and inherent desirability. Extending the “hieroglyph” idea to the ventures of Afrocuba’s researchers, we can perchance come to grips with the futility of such academic efforts.

Guillén’s terminology could not be clearer in its recognition of how ineffective it is to partition, either artistically or academically, Cuba’s heritage into self-standing entities. If the discursive complexities surrounding Afrocuba are “hieroglyphic,” as we have seen time and time again over the course of this study, positing categories leaves much unknown. This is a realization that Ortiz eventually came to grips with when he embraced a spiritual, non-racial premise. In one of the first critical studies of Guillén’s work, Ortiz predates his later insight when he states that “lo afrocubano… debe conservar su carácter” [“the Afrocuban… should preserve its character”] (Motivos de Son”, Archivos [1930]: 230). The statement summarizes the spiritual meditations of the various thinkers presented in this section and validates their collective call on behalf of leaving the African “without deforming exaggeration.” Whether
sponsoring language, heritage, history, or the national imaginary, these figures advocate a deep-seated effort at accepting Afrocuba for what it is: heterogeneous contradictions that are better left alone, undivided, and uncategorized. As in science and in literature, the most incisive approaches to Afrocuba acknowledge its inherent paradox and seek to partake of a socially corrective entrance into the Afrocuban; to present Afrocuba from the inside, letting it speak for itself to nation and to art. The panorama of writing evaluated in this chapter, along with the advent and trajectory of Ortiz’s writings, bares the success and failure of Afrocuba’s actors in their quest to fashion Afrocuba.
Conclusion

“Nuestro objeto, entonces, es esforzarnos en mostrar, de acuerdo con las apreciaciones de los afrocubanos y evadiendo todo juicio producto de nuestro intelecto, las creencias que discutimos, respondiendo a las propias reacciones del individuo; poniendo al propio afrocubano en escena y dejándolo que él mismo actúe y se haga de una teoría para explicarse lo único que [no] puede ignorar: la violencia y el trato que se le da. Si algún juicio propio se ha escapado, entiéndase como medio de facilitar la interpretación del material a mano.”

[“Our purpose, then, is to strive to demonstrate, in accordance with Afrocubans’ point of view and avoiding every judgment stemming from our intellect, the beliefs we are discussing, responding to the individual’s own reactions; placing the Afrocuban on stage only and letting him act and fashion for himself a theory that would explain the only thing he cannot afford to ignore: violence and the treatment he receives. If any judgment has been overlooked, it should be understood as a medium to facilitate the interpretation of the material at hand”]


Scholarship on Afrocuba, the documentary construction of Afrocuban national ideals and artistic representations of Afrocuba have, in this study, been unrestrained in span and, at the same time, limited in focus. We have examined a wide array of texts that span decades and boast wider ranging ideological propositions. At the same time, however, the varying discursive modes we have examined rehash an unequivocal area: the Cuban nation’s academic and artistic writing. And while notions of Cuban nationhood undoubtedly boasted differing significations between 1906 and 1957, an even more precise thematic has arisen. Whether scientific discourse or fictional narrative, poetry or explanatory prologue, the assortment of meditations we have examined seek hone reconciliation between Cuba and Afrocuba—between the mainstream white nation and its re-fashioning of non-Creole cultural heritage. The unrestrained nature of the texts in question allows for apparent discrepancy. A 1906 treatise by Ortiz condemns Cuba’s
Africanness in the hopes of eradicating its negative/anti-social effects; forty years later, another treatise by Ortiz seeks to amalgamate Cuban racial conceptions to the extent that the African be in everything Cuban, and vice-versa. When examined as a whole, Ortiz’s scholarship, his disciples’, and the artistic representations of Afrocuba that coincided with such theses, must be viewed as a progressive fruition from older to newer Afrocuba. Afrocuban studies, hence, envision a paradoxical ‘same yet different’ clarifier, thematically concentrated on Cuba’s Africanness yet ideologically polarized in its estimation of how the course of Afrocuban Studies is, at once, unrestrained and limited. But just as reconciling Los negros brujos and El engaño de las razas, or equating ¡Ecué-Yamba-O! with Motivos de Son appears nearly impossible, each text is a fundamental offering to scientific and/or artistic Afrocuban disciplines.

In Chapter Two, we addressed the beginnings of Republican Afrocuban Studies, recognizing Fernando Ortiz’s capital role as the field’s initiator and as representative of its unremitting evolution and contradictions. We situated Los negros brujos among the criminological mindset of the post-1902 Cuban leadership in order to understand early appropriations of the brujo craze and the corresponding stigma upon Cuba’s Africans. Continuing our sampling of Ortiz’s principal narratives, we analyzed the first true “self-canonizing” piece of Afrocuban Studies, Los negros esclavos. That work’s historical nature, and its crucial interplay with the nineteenth-century volumes of José Antonio Saco, premiered the first Republican efforts to come to grips with Afrocuba’s historical roots, an enlightenment that was meant to cure social maladies. Finally, Ortiz’s Hampa trilogy was closed with analysis of Los negros curros, where we saw just how difficult it was to group this text with its previous chapters on account of its lessened criminological posture and its principal motivation of historical curiosity. Curros embodied an apt bridge between Ortiz’s initial academic stages and
his later work, upheld by intensely archival ideals that aimed at donning Afrocuban Studies a hefty bibliography. Gelling with the folkloric research precepts Ortiz put forth in *Archivos del Folklore Cubano*, the rationale behind *Los negros curros* – demythifying an Afrocuban historical curiosity towards the goal of increasing national understanding of Afrocuban cultural practice – can be seen in Ortiz’s scholarship that followed.

Chapter Three examined in detail one such academic project: *Archivos del Folklore Cubano*. Through close examination of the journal’s attention to folkloric practice, principles of scientific research on Afrocuba, and guidelines for documenting Cuba’s rich Africanness, this journal became the earliest manifestation of the intensely bibliographical Ortiz, whose legacy inspired research compendia dealing with Afrocuban issues that affected artistic scenarios. The rudimentary fable and artistic narratives analyzed in Chapter Three evidence a discipline in transition, one morphing onto international artistic influence.

Chapter Four provided analysis of the latter stages of Ortiz’s career, and outlined the staples of the “later” Ortiz that signaled his final ideologies. Numerous studies, journals, and essays that lauded Cuba’s Africans were examined, from *Estudios Afrocubanos* to *El engaño de las razas*. Grouping together the texts of this stage provided insight into the intricacies of Ortiz’s scholarship – in just a few short years he is able to continue the archival ideal (e.g. *Estudios Afrocubanos, Africanía de la música folklórica de Cuba, Los bailes y el teatro de los negros de Cuba*) while positing major revisions of the most elemental of Cuban social constructs. Such thematic versatility showed the true evolution of Afrocuban Studies with Ortiz at its helm.

Chapter Five attempted to apply the already-tenuous scenarios surrounding questions of nation and national representation in Afrocuban Studies onto a wider spectrum of Afrocuban actors. By examining fictional narrative, poetic, and essay invocations of Afrocuba, we offered
fuller perspectives on the nature of Afrocuba, and benefited from taking distance from themes that revolved around the work of Ortiz. Though Ortiz reared his archival head, the innovation of the figures examined in Chapter Five (Ballagas, Cabrera, Carpentier, Guillén, Guirao, Lachatañeré, and Marinello), coupled with their extra-Afrocuban Studies influences, called for their separate treatment.

We have seen repeatedly that Afrocuban Studies, by definition, blur disciplinary and ideological constructs. Ortiz’s career partakes of the same imprecision. The resulting milieus are anything but definable, so that ethnography coexists along with fictional narrative, poetry, and historiography. Where else could legendary narrative be classified as “anthropoetry?” Yet as diverse a grouping as it is, we must acknowledge that our approach to Afrocuban scholarship and literature is, at its core, merely a sampling, and thereby ushers in analytical limits. The first of these has to do with the sheer vastness of Ortiz’s work. Thus, and for the sake of cohesion, we have trimmed down his Afrocuban compendium to a brief tour through some central snippets. Lydia Cabrera and Rómulo Lachatañeré have also made numerous contributions to Afrocuban scholarship. But the structure of this study has been limited to highlighting just a few of those offerings. Equally, we have reduced artistic approximations onto brief discussions of selective literary snapshots. For the sake of understanding the process of Afrocuban studies, over Ortiz’s life span, we have also had to limit discussion of the Cuban sociopolitical context of these years. An incredibly complex mix of polity and national conceptualizations, Republican Cuba is so constantly inconstant, if you will, that it defies being captured by either fleeting summaries or superficial textual analysis. Still, Ortiz’s role in defining the nation remains the indispensable starting point. Finally, as we noted in our introduction, Afrocuban studies did not end when Ortiz left the field, and although Revolutionary Cuba presents a host of differing
cultural and political factors, and Marxism itself necessarily devalues racial constructs, we can oversimplify the scheme by stating that questions of afrocubanidad did continue to come to light in the communist state.

Lachatañeré’s insight – cited as a preface to this conclusion – tends an astonishingly simple approach to Afrocuban Studies. Although fairly straightforward, it was not recognized in time by Afrocuban Studies. At its crux, Lachatañeré’s remarks insist that the most foundational approach toward the Afrocuban removes those encircling questions that mire true representation and brood entanglement in specific social issues. The only real “actor,” he concludes, is the Afrocuban itself, and the only real goal is social justice. In order to attain such an unbiased approach, however, Lachatañeré underscored that all other factors, racial or intellectual, must take precedence to “allowing” the Afrocuban “to act and fashion a theory for himself,” so as to prevent violence against him or her. All else is secondary, including notions of race/ethnicity, political initiatives, social judgments, stereotypes, and all of those other factors which plotted the prior course of Afrocuban Studies.

In considering this insight, it bears repeating that Afrocuban as discourse must be seen as fluid. As Carpentier reminds us in a later essay, “al incorporarse gradualmente dentro de la sociedad de sus nuevas patrias… el negro fue recuperando poco a poco un sentido poético y un sentido plástico” [“upon incorporating itself gradually within the society of its new nations… the black went on recuperating, little by little, a poetic and plastic sense”] (1999: 144). Such “poetic and plastic sense” was inscribed “gradually” into Afrocuban representation. Once again, the process of Afrocuban must not be underestimated. Lachatañeré’s call, while impossible at the turn of the twentieth century (though certainly less dubious in 1941) was met with more sympathy by the last of Ortiz’s undertakings. In this way, his remarks present, at once, a
shortcoming, a goal, and a glaring reality. In just fifty years, Afrocula had dropped its Republican guise and turned to its most basic constituent – *afrocubanidad* – before heading towards the next trajectory of an ever-impermanent Afrocuba.
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