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“Orgullosos de mi Caserío y de Quien Soy”: Race, Place, and Space in Puerto Rican Reggaetón

By

Petra Raquel Rivera

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
African American Studies  
in the  
Graduate Division  
of the  
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Committee in charge:

Professor Percy C. Hintzen, Chair  
Professor Leigh Raiford  
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Spring 2010

*“Orgullosa de mi Caserío y de Quien Soy”*: Race, Place, and Space in Puerto Rican Reggaetón

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By

Petra Raquel Rivera

## Abstract

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Petra Raquel Rivera

Doctor of Philosophy in African American Studies

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Percy C. Hintzen, Chair

My dissertation examines entanglements of race, place, gender, and class in Puerto Rican reggaetón. Based on ethnographic and archival research in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and in New York, New York, I argue that Puerto Rican youth engage with an African diasporic space via their participation in the popular music reggaetón. By African diasporic space, I refer to the process by which local groups incorporate diasporic resources such as cultural practices or icons from other sites in the African diaspora into new expressions of blackness that respond to their localized experiences of racial exclusion. Participation in African diasporic space not only facilitates cultural exchange across different African diasporic sites, but it also exposes local communities in these sites to new understandings and expressions of blackness from other places. As one manifestation of these processes in Puerto Rico, reggaetón refutes the hegemonic construction of Puerto Rican national identity as a “racial democracy.” Similar to countries such as Brazil and Cuba, the discourse of racial democracy in Puerto Rico posits that Puerto Ricans are descendents of European, African, and indigenous ancestors. Yet this conception simultaneously holds that racial divisions in Puerto Rico are obsolete, a notion at serious odds with the reality of persistent white privilege on the island.

I argue that discourses of racial democracy are spatially constituted in a “cultural topography.” Different conceptions of blackness are “emplaced” within distinct locations throughout the island such that certain towns or neighborhoods are associated with particular ideas about blackness. These multiple ideas about blackness operate differently vis-à-vis racial democracy. On one hand, representations of a “folkloric” and “antiquated” blackness have been emplaced in the northeastern town of Loíza to symbolize the African component of racial democracy. At the same time, an understanding of blackness as “abject” is emplaced in urban housing projects, or *caseríos*, as the “primitive” counterpoint to the more “modern” whitened Puerto Rican nation sustained by racial democracy. The perceived connections between distinct conceptions of blackness and particular places throughout Puerto Rico often conflict and, in the process, expose some of the contradictions inherent to dominant discourses of racial democracy. Specifically, mapping out the various emplacements of blackness in Puerto Rico calls attention to racial democracy discourses’ simultaneous inclusion and exclusion of blackness into elitist depictions of Puerto Rican identity. At the same time, possibilities exist within these contradictions to express other definitions of blackness that refute racial democracy discourses.

Reggaetón inserts one alternative understanding of blackness into Puerto Rican society. Multiple processes of migration and cultural exchange exposed Puerto Ricans in San Juan to musical practices from various sites in the African diaspora including hip hop, Jamaican dancehall, and Panamanian *reggae en español*. Puerto Rican youth combined these various musical influences in unique ways to produce reggaetón. At the same time, however, participation in diasporic space also introduced Puerto Rican youth to new ways of imagining blackness. Through their own experiences with migration to the United States, Puerto Rican youth encountered new forms of racialization that, in turn, led to the recognition of comparable experiences of racial exclusion with other African diasporic communities. Reggaetón developed in part through these various diasporic connections, expressing black identities that countered the local processes of racialization in Puerto Rican discourses of racial democracy.

My dissertation begins with the development of underground, the precursor to reggaetón, in the mid-1990s. I discuss the specific ways in which engagement with diasporic space created the conditions of possibility for reggaetón to develop in Puerto Rico. My chapters about the initial creation of underground and the success of artist Tego Calderón demonstrate that diasporic resources give new valence to understandings of blackness that transcend the boundaries of Puerto Rico's cultural topography. In addition, I show how these cultural expressions also transform the meanings of already widely recognized Afro-Puerto Rican signifiers.

History has shown us that radical cultural politics are often met with tremendous resistance, and the constitutive forms of this resistance can tell a story about national and racial imperatives. I analyze two government-sanctioned campaigns aimed at censoring reggaetón to consider the ways that diasporic spaces pose serious challenges to the authority of racial democracy. In the 1990s, the Puerto Rican government confiscated underground recordings as part of a larger anti-crime initiative. Several years later, in 2002, the Puerto Rican Senate launched an Anti-Pornography Campaign that targeted sexual imagery in reggaetón music videos. I consider these initiatives as evidence of the perceived "threat" that reggaetón posed to hegemonic constructions of racial democracy. An analysis of the multiple censorship campaigns against reggaetón reveals the pedagogical moves that the Puerto Rican government employed in an attempt to maintain the hegemony of elitist discourses of racial democracy.

Situated in the intersecting fields of race theory, diaspora theory, and cultural studies, my dissertation employs interdisciplinary methodologies and a multi-faceted theoretical approach to consider the work of diaspora in Puerto Rican reggaetón. My research illuminates the ways that reggaetón articulates understandings of blackness that challenge hegemonic constructions of race and national identity and, in the process, create possibilities for connecting blackness and Latinidad in new ways.

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my sister, Carmen Andrea Rivera, whose commitment and hard work towards making the world a better place inspires me everyday.

And to the loving memory of our grandparents:

Dr. Leonard W. Weiss

Eugenio Rivera Soto

and

Mercedes Santana de Rivera

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Perhaps unfortunately for her, my sister Carmen Andrea Rivera moved in with me just as I began to write this manuscript. She has kept me grounded, and made sure I remembered that scholarship must make a positive impact in the “real world.” I hope that this dissertation makes her proud.

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Please note, I have borrowed the phrase “*Orgulloso de mi caserío y de quien soy*”, translated as “Proud of my *caserío* and who I am,” included in the title from Don Omar’s song “*Amarga Vida*.”

## Chapter One: Introduction

In 2005, Efraín Fines Nevares, more popularly known as “Tito el Bambino,” became the first reggaetón artist to perform in the prestigious Centro de Bellas Artes in San Juan, Puerto Rico. At the time, Tito el Bambino’s second album, *Top of the Line*, was very popular in Puerto Rico, the United States, and Latin America, and the artist participated in public campaigns against violence, drugs, and dropping out of school in Puerto Rico. The director of the Centro de Bellas Artes, Daria Rodríguez, stated that Tito el Bambino’s music and involvement in the anti-drug campaigns “*nos parece pertinente para la programación en Bellas Artes*” [seems appropriate for our programming at the Center for Fine Arts]. The Centro de Bellas Artes Luis A Ferré opened in 1981 as one of the most prestigious performance venues in Puerto Rico. The Centro is home to the Orquesta Sinfónica de Puerto Rico (Puerto Rican Symphony) and the Festival Casals, an annual series of classical music concerts featuring internationally renowned classical musicians. In the past, the Centro de Bellas Artes was involved in several controversies regarding the inclusion of working class black cultures in their venue. For example, in 1982, salsa artists Rubén Blades and Willie Colón were denied the opportunity to perform in the Centro, and in 1988, a debate regarding the suggestion to name the Centro de Bellas Artes after musician Rafael Cortijo took place (Flores 1993; Vargas 2003). Interestingly, one of the groups that garnered much controversy when they were prohibited from performing at the Centro de Bellas Artes was popular reggaetón duo Héctor y Tito, the group in which Tito el Bambino began his career, in 2003.

The controversy surrounding the denial of Héctor y Tito’s request to perform at the Centro de Bellas Artes involved serious concerns regarding the entanglements of race, class, and national identity presented by reggaetón more generally. Letters to the editor in San Juan’s newspapers sought to evaluate reggaetón’s artistic merit and status as a “national” music in the debate regarding the artists’ potential performance in Centro de Bellas Artes. Several letters expressed disdain for the inclusion of reggaetón artists in the Centro de Bellas Artes. One particular letter stands out as especially harsh against reggaetón:

*¿Quién dijo que el rap es música? El rap no tiene nada que aportar musicalmente y las letras de sus ‘canciones’ son de baja calidad literaria, debilitando así nuestro idioma. Las suciedades que expresan en sus letras son un verdadero asco.*

*Es lamentable que gran parte de la juventud puertorriqueña pierda su tiempo y dinero escuchando semejantes basuras discográficas. Muchas de sus letras son ofensivas hacia las mujeres. Sin embargo, irónicamente, muchas de ellas apoyan esta barbaridad ‘perreando’ y ‘culeando’ mientras las insultan y lo menos que le dicen es ‘perra.’*

*En muchos sitios que se presentan los raperos se forman motines y revoluciones. Si permitimos que gente de esta calaña se presente en un sitio tan prestigioso, entonces, que sitio le vamos a dar a la Sinfónica. ¿Dónde va a cantar un Plácido Domingo? (Nevado 2003).*

[Who said that rap is music? Rap doesn’t have anything to contribute musically and the lyrics to its ‘songs’ are of a poor literary quality, weakening our language. The obscenities that they express in their lyrics are truly revolting.

It is sad that a large part of Puerto Rican youth wastes their time and money listening to this garbage. Much of the lyrics are offensive against women. However, ironically, many women support this barbarity, ‘*perreando*’ and shaking their asses while they insult them and at the very least call them “bitches.”

In many places where rappers perform, riots and revolts occur. If we let people of that sort perform in a place so prestigious, then what place will we give to the Symphony. Where will a Plácido Domingo sing?]

This particular letter, published in San Juan’s newspaper *El Nuevo Día*, illuminates many of the anxieties surrounding the impact of reggaetón on Puerto Rican society. The discussion of the sexuality and violence associated with reggaetón performances reflects many common stereotypes of reggaetón. Furthermore, this letter’s emphasis on the impact of the physical presence of reggaetón artists and fans within Centro de Bellas Artes presumes an inherently hypersexual and violent nature of the individuals who participate in and watch reggaetón performances.

These assumptions also reiterated many stereotypical tropes associated with blackness in Puerto Rico. Indeed, as I will demonstrate, one of the constructions of blackness that circulates in Puerto Rico is an “abject” blackness, defined by multiple stereotypical tropes such as hypersexuality and proclivities for violence. This abject blackness is associated with the *caseríos*, or urban housing projects, where reggaetón developed in the 1980s and 1990s. Consequently, embedded within the letter’s discussion of the potential violence and hypersexuality associated with Héctor y Tito’s performance is the perpetuation of the positioning of reggaetón as an expression of this abject blackness.

In addition, the letter to the editor reveals anxieties surrounding the potential of reggaetón to transform Puerto Rican national identity. Puerto Rican national identity<sup>1</sup> is outlined by “racial democracy,” which defines Puerto Ricans as the descendents of African, indigenous, and European ancestors. Despite the rhetoric of inclusion, discourses of racial democracy maintain whiteness, upholding European cultural practices as the most “influential” in the development of Puerto Rican culture. As the most prestigious performance venue in Puerto Rico, the Centro de Bellas Artes reflects this privileging of European culture in its programming that centers primarily on classical music. The letter describes the performance of reggaetón at Centro de Bellas Artes as, in effect, tainting the pristine venue, displacing allegedly more valuable cultural acts such as classical music or opera (evident when the author asks, “Where will Plácido Domingo sing?”). Ultimately, the debates regarding Héctor y Tito’s performance of reggaetón in the Centro de Bellas Artes serve as a metaphor for the insertion of reggaetón’s expressions of a diasporic black identity into the definitions of national identity in Puerto Rico.

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<sup>1</sup> Some may consider my use of “national identity” a misnomer given Puerto Rico’s lack of political sovereignty and the ongoing colonial relationship between Puerto Rico and the U.S. Despite this colonial status, several scholars such as Arlene Dávila (1997) and Jorge Duany (2002) have argued that Puerto Ricans, including in some cases those living in Puerto Rican migrant communities in the United States, imagine themselves as members of a distinct cultural nation. This form of cultural nationalism recognizes a unique culture that unites Puerto Ricans despite their lack of political sovereignty. As the dominant ideology defining Puerto Rican identity, racial democracy provides the basis for hegemonic constructions of Puerto Rican cultural nationalism.

Indeed, as Wayne Marshall, Raquel Z. Rivera and Deborah Pacini Hernández (2009) point out, “One of the most prominent reasons reggaeton [*sic*]...has been valued by fans and devalued by detractors is the genre’s defiant embrace of blackness and its insistent connections to hip-hop’s and reggae’s race-based cultural politics” (9). These “race-based cultural politics” are intimately tied to reggaetón’s relationship to the broader African diaspora. Musically, reggaetón incorporates influences from several African diasporic genres, including rap and hip-hop, dancehall, *reggae en español*, merengue, salsa, and other Latin music genres. In addition to the musical similarities, however, the “race-based cultural politics” that link reggaetón with these musical practices involves a recognition of the shared experiences with racial exclusion in the respective communities from which these musical genres emerged. Moreover, reggaetón’s affiliations with blackness directly refute the whitening bias intrinsic to dominant constructions of Puerto Rican national identity. As Frances Negrón-Muntaner and Raquel Z. Rivera (2007) have recently argued: “[R]eggaetón calls attention to the centrality of black culture and the migration of peoples and ideas in (and out of) Puerto Rico, not as exotic additions but as constitutive elements. If Puerto Ricans and other Latin Americans have celebrated Spain as the ‘motherland,’ reggaetón redirects the gaze towards Africa’s diasporas.”

Reggaetón’s general embracing of an African diasporic orientation directly contrasts the Hispanic bias inherent to discourses of racial democracy. Still, while I maintain that the controversy regarding Héctor y Tito’s potential performance in the Centro de Bellas Artes contains underlying assumptions regarding blackness, it is important to note that neither of the two reggaetón artists would be considered racially black in Puerto Rico. Rather, Tito, especially, appears as a racially mixed artist who embodies the typical “Mediterranean” look that pervades the Puerto Rican (and Latin American) media.<sup>2</sup> As in many Latin American countries, Puerto Rican racial categories move beyond the black/white binary typical of the United States to include a host of intermediary racial categories that denote a position along a black/white racial spectrum. Moreover, racial identity may be mitigated by other factors, such as socioeconomic class, place of residence, and nationality.<sup>3</sup> Although Héctor y Tito may not have been considered phenotypically black, their participation in a popular music affiliated with working class, predominantly black communities connected them with particular tropes of blackness.

By 2005, the year that Tito el Bambino was honored as the first reggaetón artist to perform in the Centro de Bellas Artes, reggaetón had become a lucrative industry, shifting from what Wayne Marshall (2009) termed “*música negra* to reggaeton Latino.” Despite earlier attempts by the Puerto Rican government to censor the music (see Chapters Four and Five), the mid-2000s saw a change in the Puerto Rican government’s depiction of reggaetón as a more “nationalized” music that could serve as one of the island’s cultural exports (Negrón-Muntaner and R. Rivera 2007). Nevertheless, the adoption of reggaetón into “mainstream” Puerto Rican culture has not necessarily translated to the ideological or social integration of blackness on the

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<sup>2</sup> Clara Rodríguez (1998) has argued that Latinos in the U.S. media tend to represent a “Mediterranean” look that includes dark hair, European features, and a fair complexion. Likewise, other scholars have argued that similar preferences for this “Mediterranean” look prevail in Latin American media and in the Latin music industry (e.g. see Dávila 2002, López 2001, M. Figueroa 2003, Martínez 2004).

<sup>3</sup> As I describe in greater detail in Chapter 2, blackness and Dominican identity are often conflated in Puerto Rico. Likewise, Nuyoricans (i.e. Puerto Ricans from New York) are generally portrayed as “blacker” than the rest of the population.

island, despite the music's continued African diasporic orientation. Rather, Félix Jiménez argues that white(r) artists have become more visible than their black counterparts in Puerto Rican society. This may explain why Tito el Bambino, as opposed to perhaps even more successful self-identified black artists such as Tego Calderón or Don Omar, broke the barriers of the Centro de Bellas Artes.<sup>4</sup> Beyond his shifting racial identification, Tito el Bambino also embodies several of the "moral" standards associated with elitist constructions of racial democracy. Tito el Bambino's website describes him as a "Christian" man with a "clean image" and "desire to dress neatly."<sup>5</sup> As a solo artist, the marketing of Tito el Bambino as a religious man who dresses "well" conforms easily to the notions of respectability that comprise a critical element of Puerto Rican national identity and its affiliations with whiteness. As such, Tito el Bambino could become the first reggaetón artist to perform in the Centro de Bellas Artes.

The irony of Tito el Bambino's journey to the Centro de Bellas Artes speaks to many of the central issues in this dissertation, especially the shifting entanglements of race, gender, class, and national identity in Puerto Rico that reggaetón makes evident. These shifts have produced multiple understandings of blackness that circulate throughout Puerto Rico, often in contradictory ways, and usually with the distinct goal of maintaining the hegemony of racial democracy discourses. As a popular music with multiple connections to different sites throughout the African diaspora, reggaetón expressed a new understanding of blackness that refuted the persistence of modern racial hierarchies consistent with hegemonic constructions of racial democracy.<sup>6</sup> In 2003, reggaetón was rapidly becoming one of the most popular musical genres in Puerto Rico, accounting for one third of the total record sales on the island (Negrón-Muntaner and R. Rivera 2007). Despite its mainstream success, Wayne Marshall (2009) states that reggaetón continues to be recognized by artists, fans, and detractors as a music affiliated with blackness (58). Indeed, reggaetón remains a vehicle through which individuals participate in an African diasporic space and, as a result, produce new links between blackness and Puerto Rican identity.

Until relatively recently, little scholarship was published about reggaetón. The burgeoning growth of reggaetón scholarship has followed the music's international success. The pioneering work of Raquel Z. Rivera regarding underground, the rap-reggae hybrid that preceded reggaetón, provided critical analyses of the music's racial and gender politics (R. Rivera 1992/1993; 1997a; 1997b; 1998; 2009). Mayra Santos Febres (1996a; 1996b) and Jorge Giovanetti (2003) also published examinations of the role of underground in Puerto Rican society.

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<sup>4</sup> Since 2005, however, other reggaetón artists including Don Omar, Jowell y Randy, Arcangel and Ivy Queen have performed at Centro de Bellas Artes. Some of the artists, such as Don Omar and Randy, identify as black.

<sup>5</sup> Here, the issue dress becomes particularly important. Reggaetón artists incorporate influences from hip hop fashion such as baggy jeans, long shirts, and cornrows into their dress. As such, this fashion has not only come to represent reggaetón, but also implies a certain racialized and class positioning within Puerto Rican society. Tito el Bambino's "desire to dress neatly" moves away from the typical reggaetón "look."

<sup>6</sup> It is important to recognize that other genres of popular music in Puerto Rico also challenge racial democracy in this way. For example, in its early years, salsa provided a space for working class youth to embrace their Afro-Caribbean roots and diasporic affiliations. See Aparicio 1998; Berríos-Miranda 2004; Berríos-Miranda and Dudley 2008; Duany 1984; J. Flores 1993; J. Flores 2009 for more information.

Since then, more recent research about reggaetón has included book chapters, journal articles, academic theses, and the first academic anthology dedicated to the music, *Reggaeton*, published in 2009. Some of these authors have examined the history of reggaetón, including its connections with other forms of popular music from the African diaspora (e.g. E. Baker 2005; Marshall 2009; Samponaro 2009). Others have focused more specifically on certain issues within reggaetón, including the music's gender politics (e.g. Báez 2006; Jiménez 2004; Jiménez 2009; Nieves Moreno 2009; Rexach Rodríguez 2003; Vazquez 2009), lyrical content (e.g. Galindo Ramos 2004), legal and “moral” concerns in reggaetón (e.g. Calo Delgado *et. al* 2003; González Acosta 2002; Rexach Rodríguez 2003), and the nationalization of reggaetón in Puerto Rico (e.g. see Negrón-Muntaner and R. Rivera 2007; R. Rivera 2007). A few other scholars have focused specifically on reggaetón scenes elsewhere in the Americas, including Cuba and the Dominican Republic (e.g. see Fairley 2009; G. Baker 2009; Pacini Hernández 2009).

Early scholars of reggaetón emphasized the music's racial and spatial links to urban black communities (e.g. see R. Rivera 1992/1993; R. Rivera 1997a; R. Rivera 1997b; R. Rivera 1998; R. Rivera 2009; Santos Febres 1996a; Santos Febres 1996b). More recent scholarship by Wayne Marshall (2009) and Zaire Dinzey Flores (2008) makes critical assessments of reggaetón's contemporary expressions of black urban identities in Puerto Rico. I hope to complicate these discussions about race and reggaetón by calling attention to the relationship between reggaetón's local racial positioning in Puerto Rico and its broader African diasporic connections. To that end, I examine and theorize reggaetón's insertions of a new “diasporic” blackness into Puerto Rican national space. Consequently, my dissertation is in conversation with not only the research about reggaetón, but also with scholarship about race, discourses of hybridity (particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean), and diaspora. I argue that reggaetón artists and fans rely on diasporic resources from elsewhere in the African diaspora to articulate new links between Puerto Rican identity and blackness that, in turn, expose the contradictions inherent to dominant constructions of racial democracy.

### ***“Nosotros podemos decir que somos negros”***

The above quote, “We can all say that we are black,” comes from Adriana, a young college student in San Juan. Adriana's quote speaks to one of the fundamental tenets of so-called racial democracy—that is, the recognition of blackness as a constitutive element in Puerto Rican identity. According to Adriana, this recognition of blackness in Puerto Rico reveals the illogical persistence of racism on the island: “*sería ilógico ser racista contra un negro, y lo hay, porque lo hay. Y es estúpido. Es estúpido porque eso no tiene caso porque tú también eres negro, que seas blanco, que seas albino, que seas jincho, rubio con ojos verdes, ojos azules. Aquí es que no se puede, no se debe*” [it would be illogical to be racist against a black person, and it's there, because it's there. And it's stupid. It's stupid because it doesn't make sense, because you are also black even if you are white, albino, *jincho*<sup>7</sup>, blond with green eyes, blue eyes. Here it's that you cannot or should not be racist].<sup>8</sup> Adriana's assessment of the incongruence of the co-existence of

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<sup>7</sup> *Jincho* refers to someone very pale, usually with dark hair. At times, the term “*jincho*” can be considered derogatory.

<sup>8</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the author.

the recognition of blackness in Puerto Rico (“we are all black”) and the persistence of racism on the island reveals the fundamental contradiction of discourses of racial democracy. These discourses promote rhetoric of “racelessness” while simultaneously reinforcing modern racial hierarchies that consistently devalue blackness.

Puerto Rican racial democracy shares many characteristics with other discourses of hybridity in the Americas. As Shalini Puri (2004) notes, although discourses of hybridity such as *mestizaje*, creolization or racial democracy respond to the local dynamics of race in their specific countries, such discourses share a motivation to unify their diverse national populations. In countries where the majority of the population were classified as non-white, elites often deployed discourses of hybridity in an effort to affiliate their respective Latin American and Caribbean countries with European modernity (Hintzen 2002; Jiménez Román 2005). In other words, discourses of hybridity attempted to unify a population under the banner of race mixture while keeping intact hierarchical structures that privileged whiteness (Jiménez Román 2005). In turn, this privileging of whiteness extended to the representations of national identities that sought to conform to the Eurocentric standards of Western modernity (Hintzen 2002; Puri 2004; Quijano 2000). Several scholars of race in the Americas have discussed the commitment to whiteness that is part and parcel of discourses of hybridity in a variety of Latin American and Caribbean national and historical contexts (e.g. see Graham 1990; Hall 2003a; Hall 2003b; Hanchard 1996; Hintzen 2002; Jiménez Román 2005; Oboler and Dzidzienyo 2005; Rahier 2003; Telles 2004; Torres and Whitten 1998; Wade 1994; Wade 1997). Still, as many of these scholars recognize, although discourses of hybridity privilege whiteness, they do not entirely eliminate blackness from their depictions of national identity. Rather, discourses of hybridity entail the strategic inclusion of certain understandings of blackness into their conceptions of national identity while simultaneously rejecting other ideas of blackness.

In the Puerto Rican context, discourses of racial democracy have produced several different conceptions of blackness that circulate simultaneously. I term the two dominant constructions of blackness in Puerto Rico “folkloric blackness” and “abject blackness.” Though seemingly distinct, folkloric blackness and abject blackness work together to reinforce the hegemony of racial democracy discourses. Represented by such cultural practices as the music and dance bomba, the narratives surrounding folkloric blackness consistently depict blackness as the “least” influential element in the racial triad that comprises Puerto Rican identity. This is reflected in the popular reference to blackness as Puerto Rico’s “*tercera raíz*” [third root]. Isar P. Godreau (1999; 2002; 2006; 2009) argues that this “folklorization” of blackness has allowed for the incorporation of blackness into constructions of Puerto Rican identity without compromising the privileging of whiteness in hegemonic portrayals of Puerto Rican national identity. In this vein, Godreau (2002a) points out that racial democracy “not only encourages, but also enables dominant, romantic representations of black communities as remnants of a by-gone era” (283-284). Dominant constructions of racial democracy celebrate a specifically folkloric blackness as a historical influence in the development of Puerto Rican identity. As a result, discourses of racial democracy imply that blackness and race issues are irrelevant to contemporary Puerto Rican society, ignoring the realities of many urban black populations on the island.

Place plays a critical role in “authenticating” the various images of blackness that circulate in Puerto Rico. As I argue in greater detail in Chapter Three, particular constructions of blackness are “emplaced” in specific geographic locations on the island. Narratives that isolate



distinct emplacements of blackness presumably authenticate these entanglements of race and place in the popular imagination. Folkloric blackness has been emplaced in the northeastern town of Loíza. Popular narratives surrounding Loíza not only highlight the town's predominantly black population, but also present its rural landscape and relative isolation from the densely populated urban areas that surround it as "evidence" of the town's "pure Africanness" (M. Pérez 2002). Therefore, Loíza is represented as a town that has preserved historical and "authentic" African traditions with relatively little (if any) influence from the Spanish culture that presumably forms the foundation of Puerto Rican identity. The presence of several folkloric performance groups and artisans, such as bomba musicians or creators of *vejigantes*<sup>9</sup>, in Loíza has reinforced this reputation. Many of these groups have also received funding from the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña (ICP), an "autonomous" organization with ties to the government charged with defining and maintaining Puerto Rican culture; these investments add to Loíza's reputation as the place with the most "authentic" African traditions. In the end, the particular entanglements of race and place position folkloric blackness in Loíza as the quintessential symbol of Puerto Rico's African heritage which has been strategically included within dominant discourses of racial democracy.

The emplacement of blackness in Loíza implies that the town remains the singular "black place" in Puerto Rico compared to the rest of the presumably more "mixed" or "white" Puerto Rican population.<sup>10</sup> However, other understandings of blackness also circulate in Puerto Rico, including "abject" blackness which centers more explicitly on urban communities. Abject blackness perpetuates common stereotypes of blackness, such as violence and hypersexuality, that are attributed to the residents of working class, predominantly black and brown urban communities, in public housing projects called *caseríos*. Such stereotypes have circulated throughout the twentieth century in both U.S. and Puerto Rican writings and media representations (e.g. see Rivero 2005; Santiago-Valles 1994); however, the popular associations between urban sectors of the Puerto Rican population and abject blackness were cemented with increased levels of violence between the 1970s and, especially, the 1990s (e.g. see Rodríguez Beruff 1999; Santiago-Valles 1995; Santiago-Valles 1996). The Puerto Rican government responded to this increased violence with the *Mano Dura contra el Crimen* [Hard Hand Against Crime] campaign in the mid-1990s. The activities of the campaign targeted the *caseríos* and involved the continuous policing of housing projects by the U.S. National Guard and Puerto Rican police (Simon 1997a; Simon 1997b). Images of young, predominantly black male *caserío* residents accused of a variety of crimes, ranging from robbery and drug dealing to homicide, pervaded the Puerto Rican media (e.g. see Rivera-Bonilla 2002; Rodríguez-Beruff 1999; Santiago-Valles 1995; Santiago-Valles 1996). These images reinforced the perceptions of *caseríos* as the locus of an "abject" blackness defined by various "immoral" characteristics that departed from the presumably more "respectable" Puerto Rican values. Moreover, these

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<sup>9</sup> *Vejigantes* are masks made out of coconut shells that are worn during the religious festival for Santiago Apóstol in Loíza. Like bomba, they are often considered emblematic of Puerto Rico's African heritage.

<sup>10</sup> Other towns such as Guayama are also popularly recognized as emplacements of a folkloric blackness although they may not have received the same degree of institutionalization as Loíza. For example, the baseball team in Guayama is "Los Brujos" [Witches], a nod to the town's predominantly African population and the supposed concentration of African-based spiritist practices there. Also, Isar P. Godreau (1999; 2002; 2006) has shown how the neighborhood of San Antón in Ponce is recognized as another emplacement of folkloric blackness within the city. However, tourism agencies and the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture have granted more funding to Loíza in order to maintain their Afro-Puerto Rican traditions (Dávila 1997).

representations ignored the economic structural policies that had produced rapid deindustrialization on the island and massive unemployment among Puerto Rico's poor and working class (e.g. see Grosfoguel 2003; Santiago-Valles 1994).<sup>11</sup> The emplacement of abject blackness within the gates of the *caseríos* signifies both an ideological and physical boundary that supposedly contains abject blackness within select areas of the island. As opposed to the incorporation of folkloric blackness into hegemonic constructions of Puerto Rican identity, abject blackness is positioned as fundamentally distinct from the values associated with Puerto Ricanness.

Adriana's comments regarding the "illogical" co-existence of racial discrimination with a national discourse of racial harmony underscore the multiple constructions of blackness that circulate within Puerto Rico. Although folkloric blackness and abject blackness contradict each other, they work together to sustain hegemonic discourses of racial democracy. Folkloric blackness is easily assimilated into racial democracy as a historical influence in the construction of Puerto Rican identity and is a celebrated component of national culture. At the same time, abject blackness signifies that which cannot be subsumed under racial democracy discourses—a more contemporary, urban blackness that is portrayed with stereotypical tropes of violence and hypersexuality that, in turn, divorce blackness from Puerto Rican "respectability." Despite their conflicting positions vis-à-vis Puerto Rican national identity, both folkloric blackness and abject blackness help maintain Puerto Rico's affiliations with whiteness because blackness is positioned outside of contemporary Puerto Rican society.

Within this context, reggaetón inserts another image of blackness that counters both the folkloric and abject constructions of blackness and, subsequently, hegemonic discourses of racial democracy. Indeed, several scholars have pointed out that the contradictions in racial democracy discourses and other discourses of hybridity provide spaces for new imaginings of blackness to emerge (e.g. see de la Fuente 2001; Puri 2004; Wade 2005). In addition, several scholars have shown how Latin American and Caribbean popular music serves as a site where black identities are negotiated in relation to the discourses of hybridity in their respective countries (e.g. see Fernandes 2003; J. Flores 2009; Guilbault 2007; Pacini Hernández and Garofolo 1999/2000; D. Thomas 2004; Wade 2000; West-Durán 2005). Often, such musical practices reveal not only transnational connections with (im)migrant communities elsewhere, but also broader African diasporic affiliations (e.g. see J. Flores 2009; Guilbault 2007; D. Thomas 2004; West-Durán 2005). In Puerto Rico, reggaetón emerged in part as a response to the contradictions within discourses of racial democracy, especially the rhetoric of racial harmony that did not account for many Afro-Puerto Ricans' experiences of racial exclusion. Reggaetón offered a space to articulate new understandings of blackness that addressed the local racial dynamics in Puerto Rico through the incorporation of diasporic resources from other sites in the African diaspora.

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<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, critiques of these policies may often emphasize socioeconomic class divisions, displacing any discussion of race. For example, when discussing my research with several graduate students at the University of Puerto Rico, most advised me to focus more on socioeconomic class rather than racial divisions since they considered racism obsolete. However, I would argue that this emphasis on class rather than race, an issue prevalent throughout Latin America, allows for the perpetuation of the "blackness as abject" stereotype; that is, by neglecting the racial component of such policies, black urban communities can continue to be portrayed as "inferior" not only to elite Puerto Ricans, but also their white working class counterparts.

### “Ese Flow Caribeño-Africano”

Reggaetón’s popularity has brought many influences from the African diaspora to Puerto Rican society. Not only have these resulted in unique musical fusions, but also the development of new fashions and styles among Puerto Rico’s youth. Influenced by the stylistic cues of U.S. hip hop, many male reggaetón artists and fans have adopted baggy jeans, long t-shirts and sweatshirts, sneakers and baseball caps as integral elements in reggaetón fashion.<sup>12</sup> In some cases, earrings and “*blinblineo*,” or diamond jewelry, are also considered to be “typical” reggaetón fashion. Finally, *trenzas*, or braids, and cornrows serve as other identifying traits of a reggaetón fan. These male fans are often referred to (sometimes derogatorily) as “*cacos*.” Some of the individuals I interviewed in Puerto Rico pointed out that reggaetón fans experienced certain forms of “discrimination,” ranging from being stopped by the police to not being able to obtain employment, based on the particular fashion, especially *trenzas*, that they wear.<sup>13</sup> Such incidents exemplify the extent to which the stereotypes of abject blackness have been attributed to reggaetón artists and fans.

At the same time, reggaetón fashion expresses a particular diasporic orientation. *Trenzas* serve as an overt physical representation of an affiliation with African diasporic aesthetics. As in much of Latin America, hair in Puerto Rico is an important signifier of racial identity, with straight hair considered “good hair” [*pelo bueno*] associated with European aesthetics and “bad hair” [*pelo malo*] recognized as a marker of blackness (Caldwell 2004; Candelario 2007; Godreau 2002b). In this context, Isar P. Godreau (2002b) argues that hair straightening serves not simply as a distancing from blackness, but also as a strategy to avoid discrimination. Consequently, choosing to embrace one’s *pelo malo* and adorn “black” hairstyles can be interpreted as an overt expression of black identity that in some cases holds serious social and economic consequences.<sup>14</sup> The popular reggaetón duo Jowell y Randy is among the reggaetón artists who have popularized *trenzas*. Jowell notes that choosing to wear *trenzas* is an expression of a “*flow caribeño-africano, y aquí de africano todos tenemos algo*” [Caribbean-African flow, and here we all have some African heritage] (Personal communication, 5 June 2009). Like reggaetón more generally, the *trenzas* adorned by many reggaetón artists and fans therefore represent an affiliation with the African diaspora.

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<sup>12</sup> I focus primarily on male fans here because in many of my interviews and surveys, respondents identified males as the dominant reggaetón fans. I think that this reflects the positioning of reggaetón as a supremely masculinized space. Some interview participants acknowledged certain fashion associated with female fans, too, specifically referencing women’s tight clothes; often these descriptions went hand in hand with portrayals of female reggaetón fans as hypersexual. I address these gender divisions in images of reggaetón in more detail in Chapter Five of the dissertation.

<sup>13</sup> Indeed, in many of my interviews, individuals referred to discrimination on the basis of wearing “black” hairstyles. College student Ana María noted that individuals wearing *trenzas* were denied acceptance into her government internship program. Likewise, a friend who wears his hair in dreadlocks claimed that he experienced discrimination as a worker in a phone company. He argued that his boss did not want him to interact with customers in the “field” because of his hairstyle, and thus demoted him to an office job.

<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that in the 1960s and 1970s, the Afro hairstyle also served as an important marker of racial and political identification in many Latin American communities. For example, the Black Soul movement in urban Brazil embraced African American music and culture, including Afros (Dunn 1992; Mitchell 1985; Turner 1985). Likewise, influenced by the Civil Rights Movement and the participation of Puerto Ricans in the Young Lords in the United States, many early salsa fans saw the music as an expression of a uniquely Afro-Caribbean identity, which they partly represented by donning Afros (Berríos-Miranda 2004).

In this dissertation, I employ the term “diaspora” as a concept that accounts for perceived connections between African diasporic communities based on the recognition of shared experiences of racialized exclusion in different local sites. Initially, the term “diaspora” referred to the dispersal of individuals from one place to another. James Clifford (1994) argued that this dispersal resulted in a shared longing for an imagined or real homeland. As such, early definitions of the African diaspora centered on the dispersal of individuals from Africa, often because of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, who then recognize the African continent as their homeland. However, as Xavier Livermon (2006) argues, such depictions of the African diaspora tend to position Africa as a historical and static point of origin rather than an important site for the negotiation of contemporary black diasporic identities.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, these definitions of the African diaspora assume that African diasporic communities automatically look to Africa as a homeland, thus implying a unified racial consciousness. However, several scholars have insisted on the importance of understanding diaspora as an ever-changing process of identity negotiation that pays equal attention to differences and similarities across the African diaspora (e.g. see Brah 1996; Brown 1998; Butler 2001; Camp 2006; Clarke and Thomas 2006; Edwards 2003; Hall 1994; Livermon 2006; Patterson and Kelley 2000).

Tiffany Patterson and Robin D.G. Kelley (2000) have argued that diaspora must be considered both a “process” and “condition.” By “process,” Patterson and Kelley (2000) refer to diaspora’s “constantly being remade through movement, migration, and travel” while diaspora as “condition” highlights its constitution within European modernity. As Paul Gilroy (1993) famously argued, the African diaspora comprises a “counterculture of modernity”; in other words, the African diaspora emerged in part from modern European colonial projects that constructed blackness as the “primitive” and “pre-modern” counterpoint to whiteness (see also Hall 1988; Winant 2001). The global reach of European modernity has constructed racial hierarchies in various societies that routinely position blackness on the bottom. As Xavier Livermon (2006) contends, it “is not one specific unifying historical experience that can serve as the basis for the concept of the African diaspora. Rather, what tends to unite these diverse black populations is their exclusion from the discourses of European modernity” (23).

And yet, as Tiffany Patterson and Robin D.G. Kelley (2000) suggest, “Neither the fact of blackness nor shared experiences under racism nor the historical processes of dispersal makes for a community or even common identity” (19). Although global processes of European modernity condition diaspora, the links between different sites must be articulated (Brown 1998; Butler 2001; Livermon 2006; Patterson and Kelley 2000). The development and recognition of these connections across the African diaspora is especially crucial given that different locations hold varying definitions of blackness. Therefore, it is critical to consider the local manifestations of diaspora, or how specific communities express links with other sites of the African diaspora.

Xavier Livermon (2006) states that these diasporic connections emerge from “an understanding of similar experiences [that lead] populations of the African diaspora to develop similar ways of approaching exclusion” (23). As Percy Hintzen, Jean Rahier, and Felipe Smith

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<sup>15</sup> Indeed, this idea of Africa as point of origin is intimately tied to the folkloric blackness that circulates in Puerto Rico. For example, dominant narratives surrounding bomba describe the music as a direct transplant from Africa. Not only do such representations ignore the multiple musical influences in bomba from other areas of the Caribbean, but they also imply a static blackness, positioning bomba and folkloric blackness as relics of the past.

(2010) have recently argued, this understanding is developed through a process of “mutual recognition.” The “encounter” between groups in different locations of the African diaspora allows for individuals to recognize new possibilities for defining blackness that would otherwise be obscured in “place-bound fixities” (Hintzen, Rahier, and Smith 2010). In order to establish these connections, individuals located in a specific community adapt what Jacqueline Nassy Brown (1998, 2005) has termed “diasporic resources,” such as cultural practices, symbols, and icons, from other African diasporic sites to create new definitions of blackness that respond to the particular systems of racial exclusion that impact their communities.

In this context, diaspora is better considered a space rather than simply the product of historical processes of dispersal. If space is defined as the site of the negotiation of social relations (e.g. see Lefebvre 1991; Massey 1994; D. Moore 2005), then diasporic space is the site of symbolic action in which different diasporic subjects recognize similarities and affinities with individuals living in other sites of the African diaspora. Participation in this African diasporic space allows individuals to engage with diasporic resources, which they combine with local signifiers of blackness to yield new understandings of blackness. These imaginings of blackness refute the “pre-modern” depictions of blackness that are critical to European modernity. Indeed, as Avtar Brah (1996) notes, despite the “trauma” invoked by diaspora, diaspora also serves as “site of hope and new beginnings...contested cultural and political terrains where individual and collective memories collide, reassemble, and reconfigure” (193). Consequently, individuals’ engagement with African diasporic space enables them to interpolate new understandings of blackness in their respective societies that speak to both localized racial politics and the global exclusion of blackness from modernity (Hintzen, Rahier, and Smith 2010; Livermon 2006; Mercer 1994).

Puerto Rican youth engage in this diasporic space via reggaetón. Indeed, reggaetón itself emerged from several transnational flows of individual migration and cultural production. Migration between various sites in the Caribbean (most notably, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, and Panama) and New York City created the conditions of possibility for reggaetón to develop as individuals engaged in several processes of musical exchange (Marshall 2009). In addition to these musical exchanges, this process also exposed individuals to other types of diasporic resources. For example, as Tego Calderón demonstrates in Chapter Six, the exposure of many young Afro-Puerto Ricans to African American Civil Rights Movement icons, histories, and writings led to a re-evaluation of their own blackness.<sup>16</sup> Reggaetón integrates these diasporic resources with local Afro-Puerto Rican practices in order to express a new, uniquely Puerto Rican blackness.

As part of this project, reggaetón revises commonly recognized signifiers of blackness that have typically been depicted as representations of either folkloric blackness or abject blackness in Puerto Rico. For example, rather than assume that the *caseríos* contain an inherently abject blackness, reggaetón artists and fans expose the racial and class biases that underscore policies and media portrayals of *caserío* residents. Other reggaetón artists revise the

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<sup>16</sup> This is not a new process. Afro-Puerto Rican migrants to the United States such as Arturo Schomburg and Piri Thomas also wrote about their own experiences redefining their Afro-Puerto Rican identities upon traveling to the United States. Also, as Marisol Berríos-Miranda (2004) has pointed out, the Civil Rights Movement in the United States was very influential to members of the salsa music scene, which began several decades prior to reggaetón.

dominant image of bomba to represent not a pre-modern, folkloricized blackness, but rather the struggles of Afro-Puerto Rican communities on the island.<sup>17</sup> While the dominant tropes of blackness as folkloric and abject in Puerto Rico rely on processes of emplacement that demarcate particular racialized places, reggaetón pushes beyond these boundaries to express affiliations with the broader African diaspora. Thus, reggaetón integrates local Puerto Rican signifiers of blackness with diasporic resources from elsewhere in the African diaspora to produce a “diasporic” blackness in Puerto Rico that refutes the dominant discourse of racial democracy on the island.

## Methods and Outline

What are the possibilities that reggaetón offers for reconsidering blackness in Puerto Rico? What are the challenges it presents to the hegemony of racial democracy discourse on the island, and how have these challenges been managed? How does reggaetón illumine the multiple entanglements of race and place in Puerto Rico? How do individuals’ engagement in an African diasporic space intervene in the cultural politics of blackness in Puerto Rico, and what does this reveal about the contradictions of discourses of hybridity in Latin America and the Caribbean more generally? To answer these questions, I rely on a variety of sources collected during multiple trips to San Juan, Puerto Rico, in 2005, 2007, and 2008. I collected archival data from Puerto Rican newspapers in the Colección Puertorriqueña at the Biblioteca José M. Lázaro at the Universidad de Puerto Rico in Río Piedras. I also gathered articles and Puerto Rican scholarly publications archived at the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College in New York City. Newspaper accounts of reggaetón’s development, the multiple controversies surrounding the music and its artists, and commentaries from editorials and letters to the editor illuminated the debates surrounding the multiple entanglements of race, gender, class, place, and national identity present in reggaetón. To supplement these articles and assess contemporary attitudes regarding reggaetón, I conducted 100 surveys of young adults aged 18-25 at reggaetón concerts and local universities. From these surveys, eight individuals self-selected to participate in one-on-one interviews regarding race, Puerto Rican identity, and reggaetón. I also interviewed two hairdressers who were intimately involved in the reggaetón scene: Tito, who was the barber for members of Calle 13, and Mari, who made *trenzas* for Jowell y Randy.<sup>18</sup> Finally, I was fortunate to interview three reggaetón artists: Vico C, Tego Calderón, and Jowell y Randy. Interestingly, these artists represent three important moments in reggaetón’s history. Vico C is widely lauded as the first rapper in Puerto Rico and was intimately involved in the development of Puerto Rican underground. Tego Calderón is credited with making reggaetón “mainstream” in Puerto Rico in 2002, and Jowell y Randy are one of the most popular duos in the contemporary reggaetón scene on the island. I combined these more “formal” sources with my everyday experiences living in

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<sup>17</sup> Reggaetón is not the only musical genre from Puerto Rico to have articulated new ideas about blackness on the island. Musical practices such as bomba, plena, and salsa have produced similar interventions in Puerto Rican society that also questioned the validity of racial democracy (e.g. see Alamo-Pastrana 2009; Barton 1995; Berríos-Miranda 2004; Berríos-Miranda and Dudley 2008; Cartagena 2004; Duany 1984; J. Flores 2000).

<sup>18</sup> I have used pseudonyms for these hairdressers and the Puerto Rican youth who I interviewed in this dissertation. Because they are public figures and have agreed to have their names used in this work, I refer to Vico C, Tego Calderón, and Jowell y Randy by their professional names.

San Juan, attendance at reggaetón concerts in a variety of venues<sup>19</sup>, and informal conversations with family and friends.

My interest in examining reggaetón's interventions in the cultural politics of blackness in Puerto Rico required an interdisciplinary methodology. M. Jacqui Alexander (2005) suggests that interdisciplinarity serves as a critical tool that attends to the "necessary complexity to the multiple narratives about how history is made" (253). In other words, the interdisciplinary methodology employed in my dissertation does not assume blackness as a given category, but rather entails the piecing together of a variety of sources to analyze the multiple and often contradictory constructions of blackness that circulate simultaneously within Puerto Rico.

Therefore, my dissertation embraces Stuart Hall's (1994; 1996c) assertion that cultural productions are not merely reflective, but rather constitutive of identities. Although the dissertation chapters are presented chronologically, their order is meant to shed light on the various discursive and representational practices that produce folkloric blackness, abject blackness, and reggaetón's diasporic blackness. I begin with a discussion of the development of racial democracy discourses in Puerto Rico. Chapter Two, "Discourses of Racial Democracy in Puerto Rico," examines the foundational texts that outlined racial democracy in Puerto Rico. Specifically, I analyze the writings of two influential members of the *Generación del 1930s*, Antonio S. Pedreira and Tomás Blanco, whose concerns regarding the prevalence of race mixture in Puerto Rico reflect some of the fundamental tenets of racial democracy. I consider their work in relation to similar writings from Cuba and Brazil during that time to show the links between Puerto Rican discourses of hybridity and those elsewhere in Latin America. Finally, I discuss works by Isabelo Zenón Cruz and José Luis González that attempted to expose the contradictions in Blanco and Pedreira's conceptualizations of racial democracy. A close reading of these foundational texts is necessary for understanding how racial democracy discourse structures Puerto Rican national identity, and the contradictions within it that enable the creation of alternative understandings of blackness.

Chapter Three, "Mapping Puerto Rico's Emplacements of Blackness," follows Peter Wade's (1993) assertion that racial democracy is spatially constituted within a "cultural topography." I outline the various entanglements of race and place in Puerto Rico that have produced multiple "emplacements of blackness," a phrase I use to describe the ways that specific places have been imbued with distinct understandings of blackness. These emplacements attempt to confine blackness within very specific, localized boundaries in order to maintain the discourse of racial democracy's privileging of whiteness. Moreover, these multiple emplacements are considered to "authenticate" the two dominant tropes of folkloric blackness and abject blackness. Mapping these various emplacements of blackness onto Puerto Rico's cultural topography brings to light the multiple images of blackness that circulate in Puerto Rico and the contradictions within racial democracy discourses that result.

In the next chapter, "*Yo Sólo Canto Rap*": Diaspora, Cultural Nationalism, and Early Reggaetón," I consider the development of underground, the precursor of reggaetón. I examine the numerous migrations of people and transnational cultural exchanges that resulted in the

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<sup>19</sup> I attended concerts in large arenas such as the Coliseo de Puerto Rico José Miguel Agrelot, small nightclubs, and the *feria*, an outdoor fair that features nightly entertainment.

integration of diasporic resources into reggaetón. Jacqueline Nassy Brown (1998) insists that understanding the role of diasporic resources in articulating black identities requires attention to the “locally-specific social relations and associated subjectivities about locality that produce a group’s desire to appropriate diasporic resources” (317). Indeed, underground responded to a particular moment that cemented the emplacement of abject blackness within Puerto Rico’s *caseríos*, the *Mano Dura contra el Crimen* campaign. Relying on newspaper articles, song lyrics, music videos, and my interview with Vico C, I examine how underground artists employed diasporic resources to articulate a new blackness that countered the dominant image of abject blackness propagated by supporters of the Puerto Rican government’s *Mano Dura contra el Crimen* campaign. The extent to which elite Puerto Ricans perceived this new blackness expressed in underground as threatening to hegemonic discourses of racial democracy is evinced in the virulent cultural nationalism that critics leveled against the music; implicit within these critiques was a continued commitment to maintaining racial democracy discourses as the foundation of Puerto Rican national identity. Ultimately, this chapter demonstrates the ways that underground artists’ engagement with an African diasporic space produced critical interventions into the understanding of blackness in Puerto Rico, and the subsequent attempts to maintain the hegemony of racial democracy that ensued.

Chapter Five, ‘*Bailo reggaetón pero no soy chica fácil*’: *Perreo*, Moral Panic, and the Specter of Sexuality,” examines a second moment when the Puerto Rican government targeted reggaetón: the 2002 Anti-Pornography Campaign. As underground transformed into the more mainstream reggaetón, it gained popularity among broad sectors of Puerto Rican youth and circulated on popular radio and television stations. The more mainstream success of reggaetón presented a challenge to the whitened ideal of Puerto Rican identity as reggaetón artists emerged out of the emplaced blackness of the *caserío* into the national Puerto Rican space. The insertion of reggaetón into mainstream media prompted Senator Velda González to initiate the Anti-Pornography Campaign, which, although it supposedly encompassed all potentially pornographic content in Puerto Rican media, primarily targeted reggaetón music videos. More specifically, González focused on representations of women in music videos, especially the impact of overt representations of female sexuality on the “moral education” of Puerto Rican youth. However, I argue that the Anti-Pornography Campaign concerned more than just “dirty” music videos and lyrics; rather, the campaign relied on particular discourses of black sexuality, especially female sexuality, in an attempt to secure the hegemony of racial democracy discourses. The focus on black female sexuality is especially important. The construction of racial democracy relies on the recognition of black women as the bearers of the mixed race population.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, black female sexuality has since been subject to similar tropes that define abject blackness in Puerto Rico. Ultimately, this ambiguous positioning of black female sexuality reveals a fundamental contradiction in discourses of racial democracy; that is, it both constitutes a critical component of the formation of Puerto Rican identity but is still considered to be divorced from contemporary Puerto Rican society. The debates regarding reputation, respectability, and female sexuality that circulated during the Anti-Pornography Campaign reveal this inconsistency within dominant discourses of racial democracy.

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<sup>20</sup> As I describe in detail later in the dissertation, histories of the Puerto Rican population describe Puerto Ricans as the descendants of a Spanish father and black (sometimes indigenous) mother (e.g. see Alegría 1971; Díaz Soler 1953).



The final chapter, “‘Africa Me Llama’: Race, Place and Diaspora in Tego Calderón’s Reggaetón,” focuses on artist Tego Calderón, the artist credited with making reggaetón “mainstream” in Puerto Rico who is also popularly recognized as the voice of the Afro-Puerto Rican community. Using his music, media coverage of his career, and my own interview with him, I argue that Calderón’s use of diasporic resources enables him to revise Afro-Puerto Rican signifiers such as bomba into new expressions of a unique Afro-Puerto Rican identity. In the process, Calderón also blurs the boundaries of Puerto Rico’s emplacements of blackness. Although Calderón moved between the island and the U.S. throughout his youth, his musical fusions of reggaetón and Afro-Puerto Rican folklore and frequent lyrical celebrations of life in Loíza has associated Calderón with the town in the popular imagination. However, rather than portray Loíza as a static, antiquated place, Calderón reinterprets the emplaced blackness of Loíza as representative of racist and classist policies from both the Puerto Rican and U.S. governments. A product of his participation in diasporic space, Calderón’s music expresses new entanglements of race and place that overturn the assumptions of a racially harmonious state propagated by racial democracy discourses. At the same time, Tego Calderón’s combination of local and diasporic signifiers of blackness produces a fundamentally new understanding of Afro-Puerto Rican identity that insists upon the realization of racial democracy’s promise of racial equality in Puerto Rico.

Since the mid-2000s, reggaetón artists have become critical figures in Latin popular music, collaborating with artists in a variety of Latin and U.S. American popular music genres. Although critics such as Félix Jiménez (2004) maintain that this commercial success has divorced reggaetón from its original working class roots, this dissertation shows that reggaetón continues to provide a space where Puerto Rican youth negotiate the particular entanglements of race, place, gender, and national identity that impact their everyday lives. A discussion of early reggaetón demonstrates the multiple layers of African diasporic migration and cultural exchange that informed reggaetón artists’ and fans’ interventions in debates surrounding the connections between Puerto Rican and black identities. Furthermore, a detailed examination of the particular “moral crises” that underground and reggaetón provoked reveals the extent to which cultural practices present powerful contestations to the persistence of racial hierarchies within Puerto Rico. Overall, I argue that cultural practices such as reggaetón enable individuals to engage with an African diasporic space that not only refutes the racial biases intrinsic to hegemonic discourses of racial democracy, but also produces new meanings of both black and Puerto Rican identities.

## Chapter Two: Discourses of Racial Democracy in Puerto Rico

I entered the cafeteria at the Universidad de Puerto Rico in Río Piedras on a rainy November afternoon in 2007. Armed with a clipboard, business cards, and pens, I approached a group of students in the back to see if they would like to complete surveys for my dissertation project. The large group consisted of about twelve students, evenly divided between men and women, and racially mixed. As I approached the table, I recognized Juan Carlos, a student who worked in the Colección Puertorriqueña where I did my archival research. Juan Carlos enthusiastically described my project to the group, and they all agreed to do surveys.

The students discussed some of the questions about reggaetón fashion and which artists were the most popular. In general, they all completed the survey rapidly, until the very end, where I included the question, “¿Cómo se clasifica racialmente?” [How do you identify yourself racially?]. For one girl, this question posed a serious challenge, and she did not know how to answer.

She asked the group, “What should I put here, Puerto Rican? What are you putting?”

One girl responded, “Put *trigueña*.”

The girl disagreed. “I can’t put *trigueña*. My hair is blond. Should I put white?”

Juan Carlos’s friend, an older black student with an Afro hairstyle said, “Put black. We’re all black here anyway.”

Another girl, who identified herself as white, said, “We’re not all black.”

Juan Carlos’s friend explained, “Yes, everyone at this table is black. Its not about our color, its about how we live, where we live, our attitude. We’re all black.”

The white girl said, “Attitudes aren’t black or white. When I walk down the street, people think I’m white. I don’t get discriminated against. Other people walk down the street and people see them and say that they are black, and they have to deal with all this discrimination. If we don’t all look black, how can we be black?”

The rest of the table began to chime in. The girl who originally brought up the question considered the conversation between her friends, turned to me and said that maybe some people thought she was black, but really she was mixed; she wrote “*trigueña*” on her form.

This incident exemplifies the ambiguities surrounding racial identity in Puerto Rico. Puerto Rican racial categories do not correspond to the binary white/black system of classification that dominates in the United States. Rather, like many Latin Americans,<sup>1</sup> Puerto Ricans recognize a series of racial categories, including intermediary ones between black and

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Robin Sheriff (2001) has found a similar array of racial categories in the Brazilian context.

white (Duany 2002; Godreau 2000; Godreau 2008; Vargas Ramos 2005). Indeed, in my own survey of one hundred Puerto Rican youth in San Juan, I received twenty-seven different responses to the question, “¿Cómo se clasifica racialmente?” [How do you classify yourself racially?]. These responses included common racial identities (e.g. “negro,” “blanco”), ethnic or national origin identities (e.g. “latino,” “hispano,” “puertorriqueño”), and colloquial Puerto Rican racial categories (e.g. “jincho,” and “trigueño”<sup>2</sup>). Three respondents elaborated their perception of the relationship between national and racial identity: “puertorriqueño (3 razas)” [Puerto Rican (3 races)]; “puertorriqueña porque somos una mezcla de 3 razas” [Puerto Rican because we are a mixture of three races]; and, “Soy puertorriqueño, no tengo raza” [I am Puerto Rican, I don’t have a race].

The multiplicity of racial categories exhibited in my survey responses reflects the reality of race mixture in Puerto Rican society. Similar to other Latin American countries, race in Puerto Rico is not necessarily determined by biological descent, as in the United States, but rather by a series of other phenotypic characteristics such as skin color or hair texture that result in the production of multiple racial categories. Moreover, as Isar P. Godreau (2008) argues, location of residence, socioeconomic class, and other factors impact racial classifications. In the past, scholars have argued that the fluidity of racial categories in Puerto Rico indicates a more “lenient” system of race relations than in the U.S. (e.g. see Blanco 1942; Megenney 1974; Siegel 1953). These interpretations are consistent with “racial democracy,” the hegemonic discourse that defines Puerto Rican national identity. The discourse of racial democracy takes as its premise the assumption that race mixture between indigenous (Taíno), African, and European (Spanish) ancestors defines Puerto Ricanness, making racial categories such as “white” or “black” obsolete. Because racial categories are considered irrelevant, this discourse also supposes that racial discrimination is non-existent. Despite this inclusive rhetoric, however, this dominant construction of racial democracy reproduces racial hierarchies that privilege whiteness.

The development of a discourse of national identity founded on race mixture is not unique to Puerto Rico, but also exists in many other Latin American and Caribbean countries including Colombia, Brazil, Cuba, and Trinidad and Tobago (see e.g. de la Fuente 2001; Hanchard 1994a; Hintzen 2002; Khan 2004; Puri 2004; Rahier 2003; Telles 2004; Torres and Whitten 1998; Wade 1993). Different countries have manipulated discourses of hybridity such as creolization, *mestizaje*, and racial democracy to fit the specific circumstances of their nation-building projects (Puri 2004). As Shalini Puri (2004) reminds us, such discourses must be understood within specific social and political contexts.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, Puri (2004) identifies

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<sup>2</sup> *Trigueño* is a common racial identity among Puerto Ricans that literally means “wheat-colored.” *Trigueño* is a fluid term that generally implies a skin color somewhere between the white-black spectrum; however, it may also be used instead of the term “negro” to identify someone as “black” (Godreau 2000; Vargas-Ramos 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Latin America and the Caribbean is an extremely diverse region. Some countries, particularly in continental Latin America, include large indigenous populations, and consequently emphasize race mixture between indigenous and European communities as the foundations of their identities (e.g. see Hooker 2005; Puri 2004; Wade 1997). Large Asian groups, such as the Japanese in Brazil and Peru, Chinese in Jamaica, and Indians in Trinidad and Tobago, also reside throughout Latin America and the Caribbean; discourses of hybridity in their respective countries operate differently in relation to these groups (e.g. see Khan 2004 and Puri 2004 for a discussion about Indians in Trinidad). Consequently, I use the term “discourses of hybridity” to account for the various discourses found throughout Latin America and the Caribbean; when possible, I use the specific terms for individual countries.

several commonalities between these discourses of hybridity, particularly in their relationship to nation-building:

Discourses of hybridity in the Caribbean<sup>4</sup> perform several different functions. They elaborate a syncretic New World identity, distinct from that of its “Mother Cultures”; in doing so, they provide a basis for national and regional legitimacy. Second, they offer a way of balancing and/or displacing discourses of equality, which has led to their importance in many instances for securing bourgeois nationalist hegemony. Third, discourses of hybridity have been implicated in managing racial politics—either by promoting cultural over racial hybridity or by producing racial mixes acceptable to the elite (Puri 2004:45).

Puri’s (2004) arguments shift the analysis of these discourses from an assumed benign process of cultural mixture to one with entrenched relations of power that cement Eurocentric racial hierarchies within the structure of the nation (see also Hall 2003a; Hall 2003b; Hintzen 2002; Jiménez Román 2005; Oboler and Dzidzienyo 2005; Rahier 2003; Torres and Whitten 1998; Wade 1997).

Discourses of hybridity therefore centralize race in the foundation of the nation-state, a project that is intimately tied to global processes of modernity that privilege the “West” (e.g. see Goldberg 2002; Hall 1988; Marx 1998; Winant 2001).<sup>5</sup> Although discourses of hybridity rhetorically integrate distinct racial groups into a national population or culture, they maintain what Aníbal Quijano (2000) has termed the “coloniality of power,” or the structures and ideals associated with European modernity. As Miriam Jiménez Román (2005) argued, discourses of hybridity were constructed “to take into account the *coloredness* of their countries’ populations and to fashion an ideology that would rationalize the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the *criollo* elite...those whose European cultural capital made them ostensibly ‘white’ enough” (68). In these cases, deployment of race mixture as the basis of national identity does not compromise the persistence of white privilege. Instead, discourses of hybridity attempt to position their respective national identities closer to whiteness and, in turn, affiliate these Caribbean and Latin American countries with European modernity.

Nevertheless, discourses of hybridity must account for and identify the “original” racial or cultural groups that mixed together to form either a biologically racially mixed national figure and/or a hybrid national culture. Within this context, the European figure, which is virtually omnipresent in Latin American and Caribbean discourses of hybridity, holds a critical role as the

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<sup>4</sup> Puri’s (2004) work focuses exclusively on Caribbean nations; however, I contend that her arguments are relevant to the development of discourses of hybridity found in much of Latin America, as well (e.g. see Martínez-Echazábal 1998; Oboler and Dzidzienyo 2005; Rahier 2003; Wade 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Several scholars have discussed the development of modernity as an intellectual and political project that has preserved Western global hegemony (e.g. see Chakrabarty 2000; Gilroy 1993; Hall 1988; Hanchard 1994a; Maldonado-Torres 2006; Quijano 2000; Quijano and Wallerstein 1992; D. Scott 2004; Winant 2001; Wynter 2006). As the epicenter of modernity, the social, economic, and political organization of the “West” becomes the standard against which other societies are measured and assigned value, with the expectation that non-Western, supposedly “pre-modern” societies will strive to replicate and achieve modern, or Western, ways of life. The construction of racial categories is integral to the establishment of modernity as a racial project that privileges European values, knowledge production, and ways of being (Fanon 1967; Hall 1988; Quijano 2000; Quijano and Wallerstein 1992; Winant 2001).

bearer of modernity. This “European presence,” as Stuart Hall (1994) argues, incorporates the maintenance of Eurocentric aesthetics and thought within the Caribbean and Latin America. The European presence is therefore interpreted as evidence of the “whitening” of the national population, both in terms of biological mixture (i.e., white or light skin color represents standards of beauty and, depending on confluence with other factors such as socioeconomic class, belonging to the dominant group) and cultural mixture (i.e., the valorization of cultural practices considered “European” over African, indigenous, or in some cases, Asian, ones). As Percy Hintzen (2002) argues, discourses of hybridity that seek to align their respective national identities with whiteness “impl[y] a quest for European purity through cultural acquisition and miscegenation” (478).

Still, race mixture by definition requires the incorporation of other, non-white groups into conceptions of national identity to serve as a “rhetorical glue” that brings together otherwise distinct populations (Puri 2004:49). Latin American and Caribbean elites “strategically included” specific understandings of blackness within their constructions of national identity (de la Fuente 1999; Godreau 2009; Graham 1990; Puri 2004; Wade 2005).<sup>6</sup> Often, these depictions of blackness sustained biological racial hierarchies that depict blackness as inferior to whiteness. In addition, African cultural contributions were frequently portrayed as less significant than European ones in the development of these hybrid national cultures. As bearers of modernity, Europeans were thought to bring “civilized” qualities to the region, while African and indigenous cultural influences were considered limited and often relegated to folkloric contributions. The European presence is “accentuated” in order to represent Latin America and the Caribbean as “modern” nations, whereas the African presence is rendered “unspeakable” (Hall 1994; Hall 2003a). In other words, the African presence within discourses of hybridity is often considered a “polluting” factor that must be managed in order to maintain Latin America and the Caribbean’s alignment with other “modern” areas, notably Europe (Hintzen 2002).

This “absence/presence of Africa” (Hall 1994:398) within discourses of hybridity can be found in countries ranging from Cuba to Brazil to Puerto Rico. For instance, in his attempt to unify the Cuban population against Spain in the nineteenth century, José Martí (1893) famously wrote that “In Cuba, there is no fear of a racial war...Cubans are more than whites, mulattos or Negroes” (161).<sup>7</sup> Martí’s description of a racially mixed, and racially harmonious, Cuban society became the hallmark for future conceptions of Cuban identity, even though Martí has been criticized for promoting a paternalistic view of race relations.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, in 1940, Cuban

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<sup>6</sup> For the purposes of my dissertation, I am primarily concerned with the position of blackness within discourses of hybridity. While similar ambivalences regarding the incorporation of other groups such as indigenous peoples occur in Latin America and the Caribbean (e.g. see Hooker 2005; Wade 1997), a full examination of all of these contradictions is beyond the scope of this project. Therefore, I highlight how blackness functions within discourses of hybridity.

<sup>7</sup> Two years earlier, Martí wrote “Our America,” in which he made similar arguments regarding political autonomy and the irrelevance of race in Latin America as a whole. He called for the creation of republics throughout Latin America that maintained their “natural elements,” resisting control or reliance on Europe and the United States (117, 119). Among these “natural elements” was the elimination of racial categories and prejudice; Martí wrote “There can be no racial animosity, because there are no races” (119).

<sup>8</sup> Alejandro de la Fuente (2001) argues that underlying Martí’s writing was an assumption of black “indebtedness” to white liberators. In other words, black Cubans’ integration into the national public would not threaten *criollo* control over the island because blacks would be “grateful” to the white elite who had liberated them from slavery and incorporated them into the nation (de la Fuente 2001:27-28). Despite his commitment to racial equality, Martí’s

anthropologist Fernando Ortiz made a similar argument using his concept of “transculturation,” a process in which cross-cultural exchange between two groups creates a fundamentally new culture. Ortiz (1995) claimed that transculturation forms the basis of Cuban identity, writing that, “in Cuba the cultures that have influenced the formation of its folk have been so many and so diverse in their spatial position and their structural composition that this *vast blend of races and cultures overshadows in importance every other historical phenomenon*” (99, emphasis added). Like other Cubans, including Martí as well as the proponents of the *afrocubanismo* movement in the 1920s and 1930s,<sup>9</sup> Ortiz (1995) identifies Europeans, specifically from the Iberian peninsula, and Africans as the primary groups involved in transculturation.<sup>10</sup> Although transculturation implies an equal cultural exchange, Ortiz (1995) describes Africans as having been “transferred from their own to another more advanced culture,” thus implying the distinction between “modern” European and “primitive” African cultures (101-102). Indeed, he routinely depicts Africans as having contributed less than the Spanish to Cuban identity, and positions them in an intermediary position within a racial hierarchy between Europeans on the top and indigenous groups on the bottom (Ortiz 1995:99, 101).<sup>11</sup> Consequently, Ortiz represents Europeans as contributing more valuable and modern cultural elements to Cuban identity, while depicting Africans as inherently inferior within a racial hierarchy that reinscribes biological notions of race.<sup>12</sup>

Likewise, in Brazil, Gilberto Freyre’s 1933 book *Casa Grande e Senalaza* outlines Brazilian identity as characterized by both race mixture and racial harmony. Freyre’s work has

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depiction of Cuban racial democracy thus reinscribed certain notions of biological racial classifications. His justification of black incorporation to the nation due to their “gratefulness” implied a paternalistic view of race relations that lent itself to the characterization of blacks as somehow less advanced or less modern than white Cubans. It assumed that black Cubans required guidance from white elites to eventually become fully integrated within the modern nation.

<sup>9</sup> In the late 1920s and 1930s, the artistic movement *afrocubanismo* flourished during which cultural practices like rumba or *poesia mulata* centered on African influences on Cuban culture, albeit often in problematic ways that maintained stereotypes of Afro-Cuban culture as “backward, lewd or primitive” (de la Fuente 2001:180-182; R. Moore 1997:5).

<sup>10</sup> Ortiz (1995) argues that indigenous groups in Cuba, including the Ciboney, Guanajabib, and Taíno, existed during a “drowning stone age” that could not compete with European colonization, concluding that “transculturation... failed as far as the natives were concerned” (100). Therefore, Ortiz discounts any indigenous influence in the development of Cuban culture. He also acknowledges the influence of other groups, such as the Chinese, in processes of transculturation in Cuba; however, he does not elaborate on their contribution as he does with African and European groups (Ortiz 1995:98).

<sup>11</sup> For example, Ortiz (1995) describes Europeans as a “hurricane of culture” who brought with them “iron, gunpowder, the horse, the wheel, the sail, the compass, money, wages, writings, the printing-press, books, the master, the King, the Church, the banker...” (99). In other words, Spanish brought with them the “civilizing”, modern characteristics to Cuba. However, Ortiz (1995) portrays Africans as not as organized or “modern” as the Europeans, writing that Africans “brought with them their diverse cultures, some as primitive as that of the Ciboneys, others in a state of advanced barbarism like that of the Taínos, and others more economically advanced...intermediate cultures between the Taíno and the Aztec, with metals, but as yet without writing” (101).

<sup>12</sup> Ortiz’s reliance on modern racial hierarchies is not surprising given not only that other Latin American writers at the time made similar assertions, but also that Ortiz himself had gained notoriety for his commitment to biological racism. Indeed, Aline Helg (1990) points out that while Ortiz is often lauded for his seemingly anti-racist stance in later works like *Cuban Counterpoint*, his earlier works advocated an inherent criminality of Afro-Cubans, which he considered evident in cultural practices, especially religions, which he claimed contributed to the degeneration of Cuban society (51; see also de la Fuente 1999:57). Helg (1990) argues that Ortiz advocated the “de-Africanization” of Cuban culture, so as to erase undesirable criminality from Cuban society in the future (52)

been critical to the study of race in Latin America, and many scholars have identified it as one of the most influential books in Brazilian history (Skidmore 1964:490; Telles 2004:33). Freyre wrote his book during a tumultuous time in Brazilian history when newly elected Getulio Vargas attempted to incorporate black and working class supporters into Brazilian society so as to secure his position as dictator in the late 1930s (Telles 2004:36-37; Winant 2001:224-225).

In his book, Freyre (1956) portrays Brazil as a racial democracy, meaning a fundamentally racially mixed country that did not harbor any racism. He writes:

Hybrid from the beginning, Brazilian society is, of all those in the Americas, the one *most harmoniously constituted so far as racial relations are concerned*, with the environment of a practical cultural reciprocity that results in the *advanced people deriving the maximum of profit from the values and experiences of the backward ones* (Freyre 1956:83; emphasis added).

Throughout the text, Freyre refers to both biological and cultural race mixture, portraying the “advanced” Portuguese as responsible for the most important aspects of Brazilian life, and contradicting his claim that all three elements are valued equally within a racially harmonious society. Like Ortiz (1995), Freyre (1956) develops a racial hierarchy that positions Africans as an intermediary group between indigenous and European groups (281). Freyre (1956) concludes that blacks are easily “Brazilianized” through “modifying their morals and, it is possible, their physique as well, conforming them not merely to the type and functions of the slave, but to the characteristics of the Brazilian and his type” (376). Freyre’s reference to blacks’ “modification” of both their “morals” and “physique” through “Brazilianization” implies that a process of cultural and biological whitening is necessary for full inclusion within the Brazilian nation. Indeed, Freyre (1956) describes the Brazilian as “the ideal type of modern man for the tropics, a *European with Negro or Indian blood to revive his energy*” (71; emphasis added). Like Ortiz in Cuba, Freyre’s work exhibits many of the typical characteristics of discourses of hybridity in the region, including a Eurocentric cultural bias, a reliance on biological racial hierarchies, and an assumption of a completely racially mixed and harmonious society.

As the writings by Martí (1893), Ortiz (1995) and Freyre (1956) demonstrate, despite their rhetorical emphasis on race mixture, discourses of hybridity contradict themselves, reifying notions of racial “purity” conceived in biological terms and fortifying modern racial hierarchies. Similarly, Puerto Rican “racial democracy” is a *racializing* discourse that orders racialized groups and cultural practices along a hierarchy that privileges whiteness to portray Puerto Rico as a racially mixed-but-white nation.<sup>13</sup> In other words, the rhetoric of racial democracy recognizes the influence of indigenous and African groups in the development of Puerto Rican identity, but portrays the resulting race mixture as biologically and culturally whitened.

Puerto Rican racial democracy is visually represented in the seal of the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña (ICP), the institution established in 1956 to define and maintain a Puerto Rican national culture. The seal of the ICP features three men, a Spaniard in the center flanked on both sides by an indigenous man on the left and an African man on the right. The Spaniard

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<sup>13</sup> I use the term “racially mixed-but-white” to account for both the emphasis on race mixture within dominant discourses of racial democracy as well as the privileging of whiteness within this discourse.

wears an outfit reminiscent of the sixteenth century *conquistadores*, and carries a book. The indigenous man holds a stone carving, dressed only in a loincloth, with long, straight black hair cascading down his back. The muscular African man wears short cut off pants, and grips a machete and a drum in his left hand. This “racial triad” embodies the constitutive elements of Puerto Rican “racial democracy,” and, subsequently, national identity.

ICP’s seal also renders visible the cultural influences Puerto Ricans are presumed to receive from each group. Specifically, the book represents modern characteristics such as Christianity that founders of racial democracy considered Puerto Ricans to have inherited from Spaniards (see Pedreira 2005:12). On the other hand, the African and indigenous contributions are relegated to folklore, displayed by the drum and stone carving, respectively. The ICP seal reflects the different stages of modernity at which each of the three men supposedly stand, positioning the Spanish *conquistador* as the “civilized” and “modern” man while the Taíno and African men are rendered “primitive,” “pre-modern” and close to “nature.” More generally, the ICP has been instrumental in maintaining a Hispanic bias in the formation of Puerto Rican national identity (Dávila 1997:62).<sup>14</sup> The ICP presents the Spanish as contributing the most “valuable” folklore and artisanship, in addition to religion, language and intellectual tradition to Puerto Rican life (Dávila 1997:69-70). Indigenous Taínos, on the other hand, are presumed to be an “extinct heritage,” but nonetheless important because of their perceived connections to a national “past” (Dávila 1997:70).<sup>15</sup> In relation to Taíno and Spanish elements, African cultural influences are seen as the least significant, and “the last to arrive” (Dávila 1997:70). The African component of the racial triad is thus referred to as the “third root” (Dávila 1997:70), referencing the constitution of racial hierarchies that positions Africa as the “last” or “least influential” component within dominant constructions of racial democracy.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to the privileging of whiteness, the representation of blackness consistent with racial democracy is profoundly insular. Racial democracy discourses relegate blackness to an ancestral past as one element of the racial triad that comprises Puerto Ricanness. In the process, Puerto Rican “racial democracy” disavows African diasporic connections to Afro-Puerto Rican cultures. The African root of so-called racial democracy is typically imagined as the result of African settlement on the island during the transatlantic slave trade; however, the dominant narrative of this process portrays this African heritage as fully “assimilated” into Puerto Rican society via cultural and biological whitening. This presumed assimilation suggests that blackness in Puerto Rico is relegated to the past, and, in turn, that contemporary Puerto Rican society does not include affiliations with African diasporic populations, even within the Caribbean.

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<sup>14</sup> I discuss the development of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture and its Hispanic bias in more detail in Chapter Three.

<sup>15</sup> It should be noted that despite this idea of Taíno “extinction,” a “Taíno Revival” movement has taken place where individuals both in Puerto Rico and in the United States claim a Taíno identity (Haslip-Viera 2001).

<sup>16</sup> In 1992, the ICP and Centro de la Realidad Puertorriqueña (CEREP) hosted an exhibition entitled “*La Tercera Raíz: Presencia Africana en Puerto Rico*” [The Third Root: African Presence in Puerto Rico]. The exhibit meant to bring to the fore the historical significance of Afro-Puerto Rican culture to Puerto Rican life, including music, religion, arts, theater, and testimonials of historical events (CEREP/ICP 1992). Therefore, the exhibit sought to reverse Africa’s position as the “third root,” portraying African culture as equally as fundamental to the development of Puerto Rican identity as European culture.



This chapter provides an in-depth discussion of some of the key authors and debates involved in establishing discourses of racial democracy in Puerto Rico. I construct a genealogy of racial democracy discourses in Puerto Rico. As outlined by Michel Foucault (1980), a genealogical approach rejects a search for “origins.” Rather, genealogy pieces together multiple histories, events, and actors to examine the development of particular discourses and historical processes (Foucault 1980). This approach therefore allows for an examination of the strategic inclusions and exclusions of various renderings of blackness within these depictions of Puerto Rican identity. In the process, this genealogy highlights some of the contradictions inherent to dominant constructions of racial democracy in Puerto Rico.

While the ICP has been integral in the representation and reproduction of discourses of racial democracy in contemporary Puerto Rico since 1956, Puerto Rican elites developed racial democracy in the 1930s. Like Ortiz in Cuba, Freyre in Brazil, and others, these Puerto Rican writers, usually called the *Generación del 1930s* [Generation of the 1930s], were influenced by international events such as the rise of Fascism and Nazism in Europe, segregation in the United States, and U.S. interventions in Latin America (de la Fuente 2001; López-Baralt 2000; Skidmore 1993). Puerto Rican authors such as Antonio S. Pedreira and Tomás Blanco made similar arguments regarding the role of race mixture in Puerto Rico as Gilberto Freyre and Fernando Ortiz did in their respective countries. Indeed, between 1933 and 1942, all four authors published comparable theories that defined race mixture as the crux of their respective national identities.

At the same time, Puerto Ricans also responded to unique circumstances on their island, especially political and economic turmoil that resulted from U.S. colonial policies in Puerto Rico. Thus, I begin the chapter with a discussion of the context in which elite Puerto Rican constructions of racial democracy developed. I then move to an analysis of the debates between Antonio S. Pedreira and Tomás Blanco, two of the founders of discourses of racial democracy in Puerto Rico. Although Pedreira and Blanco differed in their opinions regarding the impact of U.S. colonialism on Puerto Rican life, they both advocated similar interpretations of race mixture in Puerto Rico, most notably the Hispanic bias that prevails in dominant constructions of racial democracy. Responses and critiques to their development of racial democracy arose from their contemporary, Luis Palés Matos, as well as later writers such as Isabelo Zenón Cruz and José Luis González. These responses questioned the Hispanic bias of racial democracy, advocating for a full incorporation of African elements into Puerto Rican national identity. Through this genealogy of racial democracy in Puerto Rico, I argue that racial democracy discourse includes particular and narrow conceptions of blackness that reaffirm modern racial hierarchies in order to create a national identity that privileges whiteness. At the same time, this discourse of racial democracy contradicts itself, advocating a “raceless” society while keeping intact racial hierarchies. The debates surrounding racial democracy in Puerto Rico highlight these contradictions, and are critical for identifying the possibilities that exist in Puerto Rico to create alternative understandings of blackness that call for the integration of blacks as full citizens in Puerto Rican society.

## Contextualizing Racial Democracy in Puerto Rico

Although Puerto Rico is not politically sovereign, elites on the island were influenced by both international events and domestic issues that brought to the fore the need to create a unique Puerto Rican national identity, particularly in relation to the United States. The development of a Puerto Rican national identity without political sovereignty has been identified by scholars like Arlene Dávila (1997) and Jorge Duany (2002) as a form of “cultural nationalism.” Duany (2002) defines cultural nationalism as “the assertion of the moral and spiritual autonomy of each people” (5). Cultural nationalism allows Puerto Ricans to “imagine themselves as part of a broader community that meets all the standard criteria of nationality, such as territory, language, or culture, except sovereignty” (Duany 2002:4). The discourse of racial democracy undergirds the dominant construction of Puerto Rican cultural nationalism. Specifically, the emphasis on race mixture, Spanish culture, and racial harmony that form the basis of constructions of racial democracy aimed to distinguish Puerto Rican identity from that of the United States.

After the Spanish-American War, Spain ceded several territories to the United States, including Cuba, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico. Cuba eventually became an independent nation (albeit with frequent military occupations and interventions by the United States); however, the U.S. government maintained a colonial relationship with Puerto Rico. In 1900, the U.S. government passed the Foraker Act, which created a Puerto Rican government with officers appointed by the President of the United States (Picó 2006:240-242). In 1917, the U.S. government conferred U.S. citizenship on Puerto Ricans with the passing of the Jones Act (Duany 2002:55; Picó 2006:251).<sup>17</sup> By the 1930s, the United States had firmly established Puerto Rico as one of its colonies.

The entrenchment of U.S. political and economic control in 1920s and 1930s Puerto Rico resulted in political mobilization of the working class during that time. In 1922, the Nationalist Party was founded to advocate Puerto Rican independence. Pedro Albizu Campos, a Harvard-educated lawyer who had served in a segregated African American army unit during World War I, assumed leadership of the Nationalist Party in 1929 (Picó 2006:256). Throughout the decade, U.S.-sponsored government officials routinely targeted members of the Nationalist Party, imprisoning many leaders including Albizu Campos and killing twenty-one civilians during the *Masacre de Ponce* in 1937 (Medina Vásquez 1981; Picó 2006:257).<sup>18</sup> The Socialist Party also gained support during this time period, winning some elections in 1932 and 1936 (Picó 2006:259). In the mid-1930s, some members of the Socialist Party broke off to found the Communist Party, which contributed to the organization of labor unions at that time (Picó

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<sup>17</sup> It is interesting to note that in the years leading up to the Jones Act, the U.S. government routinely portrayed Puerto Rico as a “whitened” nation appropriate for annexation, especially in relation to the Philippines, which was granted “eventual independence” in 1916 partly due to the assumption that the Philippine’s “darker” population could not be assimilated into the United States as easily as Puerto Ricans (Duany 2002:44-58).

<sup>18</sup> In March of 1937, the Nationalist Party planned a protest to commemorate the anniversary of abolition in Puerto Rico and contest the imprisonment of Albizu Campos and other leaders. The municipal government of Ponce revoked their permit at the last minute, but the Nationalist Party continued with the protest. Confrontations with the police resulted in the deaths of twenty-one civilians and became known as the *Masacre de Ponce* (Ponce Massacre; Medina Vásquez 1981; Picó 2006:257).

2006:260). These political parties provided avenues for working class mobilization as alternatives to programs derived by either U.S. or elite Puerto Rican officials.

The Nationalist and Socialist parties also responded to economic crises facing the Puerto Rican masses in the early twentieth century. Apart from the U.S. invasion of 1898, a massive hurricane in 1899 destroyed many of the coffee plantations on the island, devastating communities in the mountainous interior of Puerto Rico (Picó 2006:243). After the hurricane, sugar production surpassed coffee as the primary industry in Puerto Rico, especially after North American companies purchased many of the sugar plantations on the island (Guerra 1998:26-27). The development of U.S.-owned sugar plantations displaced many poor Puerto Rican workers and their families, who suffered from high levels of underemployment and deteriorating living conditions (Guerra 1998:24-37). The economic crisis in the agricultural sector led many Puerto Ricans to migrate to urban areas, resulting in the growth of slums (Tyrell 2008:76). In the 1930s, several strikes occurred in various industries, ranging from needlework to public transportation, including a massive strike of sugar cane workers in the southern and eastern regions of the island (Picó 2006:256, 259-260; Tyrell 2008:77). Many economic problems were further exacerbated by the onset of the Great Depression in the United States (Picó 2006:260).

Lillian Guerra (1998) argues that these economic and political changes affected both working class Puerto Ricans, who suffered dramatically from the economic circumstances surrounding the “Americanization” of Puerto Rico, and the elite classes, who felt “a loss of power, cultural and political authority, feelings of outrage at a loss of legitimacy with respect to their perceived right to lead the nation, to serve as models of civility” (37). Racial democracy developed from elite Puerto Ricans’ desire for an autonomous national identity vis-à-vis the United States, and to secure their dominant position within Puerto Rico itself. Indeed, as is typical of discourses of hybridity, elite Puerto Ricans sought to create a new national identity that would maintain the hegemony of their class through a presumed integration of the island’s non-white population while simultaneously affiliating Puerto Ricans with whiteness. Race mixture had always been a concern for Puerto Rican elites, especially considering that throughout much of the nineteenth century, free people of color comprised the majority of the Puerto Rican population (Kinsbruner 1996).<sup>19</sup> While race mixture was prevalent in the nineteenth century, laws also existed to prevent sexual relations across race and class lines, making evident the extent of Puerto Rican elites’ concerns about the impact of race mixture on society.<sup>20</sup> Puerto

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<sup>19</sup> In the nineteenth century, the relative lack of segregation, both racially and between enslaved and free people, led to an environment in which frequent race mixture occurred (Kinsbruner 1996:50; Negrón Portillo and Mayo Santana 1992). The substantial population of free people of color was in large part due to manumission of racially mixed offspring of white slave owners and enslaved African women (Kinsbruner 1996:26-27). In addition, Jay Kinsbruner (1996) found that while most marriages across the board were endogamous, there were a “considerable” amount of marriages between whites and nonwhites in listed in the mid-nineteenth century (89, 92). Sidney Mintz (1974) illustrated the prevalence of race mixture in the early twentieth century, describing the population of the plantation where he conducted his fieldwork in the 1940s as racially mixed and desegregated, with no differentiation along “color line” despite the existence of social mores that devalued blackness (56-57). The prevalence of race mixture in contemporary Puerto Rican society is evident in, for example, the multiple racial categories commonly used to describe different mixtures (e.g. see Duany 2002:238; Godreau 2000; Godreau 2008).

<sup>20</sup> For example, Eileen Suárez-Findlay’s (1999) work on nineteenth-century Ponce includes a discussion of anti-prostitution laws that targeted non-white women, whether or not they were prostitutes, subjecting them to medical exams and police surveillance. Such laws were partly established to prevent interracial sexual relationships (Suárez-Findlay 1999:81, 107-108). Suárez-Findlay (1999) also describes “honor codes” in nineteenth-century Ponce in

Rican elites sought to accommodate this history of race mixture within a discourse of a whitened national identity. Ultimately, elite Puerto Rican writers credited with forming racial democracy harkened back to an idealized “Hispanic” past and exalted race mixture in order to distinguish Puerto Rico from the United States.<sup>21</sup>

### ***La Generación del 1930s and the Pedreira/Blanco Debate***

The *Generación del 1930s* was a “table group of intellectuals, writers and artists” who Jorge Duany (2002) argues “helped to define the contemporary discourse on the Puerto Rican nation” (21). One of the major works published in the 1930s was Antonio S. Pedreira’s *Insularismo: Ensayos de interpretación puertorriqueño* in 1934. Similar to the impact of Freyre’s writings in Brazil, several scholars have described Pedreira’s work as a canonical discussion of Puerto Rican national identity (e.g. see Duany 2002; J. Flores 1993; López-Baralt 2001). Mercedes López-Baralt (2000) notes that *Insularismo* received much attention (including criticism) from scholars throughout the twentieth century, and several symposiums and conferences dedicated to Pedreira’s work have taken place in Puerto Rican universities (18-19). Jorge Duany (2002) argues that Pedreira’s work has dictated the terms around which even now discussions of Puerto Rican national identity revolve (22). Furthermore, *Insularismo*’s significance can also be measured by the large number of responses it generated, especially by Tomás Blanco, also of the *Generación del 1930s*, who published *Prontuario histórico de Puerto Rico* (1935) and *El Prejuicio racial en Puerto Rico* (1942) that criticized Pedreira’s arguments in *Insularismo*.

Antonio S. Pedreira was born in 1898 in San Juan (López-Baralt 2001:23). He attended college at the University of Puerto Rico, but did graduate work in Spain and the United States (J. Flores 1993:16; López-Baralt 2001:26, 28). Pedreira directed the newly created Hispanic Studies Department in the University of Puerto Rico in the 1920s, and founded the academic journal *Indice* (J. Flores 1993:16; López-Baralt 2001:27-28). He published several essays regarding Puerto Rican cultural and national identity between the late 1920s and his death in 1939 (J. Flores 1993:17). Still, Pedreira’s major contribution to intellectual debates regarding Puerto Rican national identity remains *Insularismo*, published in 1934 (J. Flores 1993:17; López-Baralt 2000:18-19).

In *Insularismo* (2005), Pedreira attempts to identify the Puerto Rican “character” that he claims has remained “Hispanic” (i.e. Spanish) despite U.S. colonialism (3-8). Pedreira discusses a range of topics related to the establishment of a Puerto Rican “soul,” including the island’s geography, history, popular culture, and youth. He argues, “our troublesome geographic location

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which values and moral behavior, particularly interracial and cross-class relationships, were frequently scrutinized in the court system (18-52)

<sup>21</sup> It is worth mentioning that even the more populist Nationalist Party reverted back to a Hispanic bias in their idealization of Puerto Rico’s history prior to U.S. rule (e.g. Albizu Campos 1981; González 1979:7; Picó 2006:258; West-Durán 2005:55). Fernando Picó (2006) argues that this valorization of Spain may have limited the Nationalist Party’s reach to Puerto Rican working class (258).

and enervating climate,<sup>22</sup> our biological makeup and our perpetual feudatory state all work together to depress and inhibit our collective psyche” (Pedreira 2005:27). As Juan Flores (1993) has pointed out, Pedreira depicts the “Americanization” campaign of the early twentieth century as an “interruption” in the development of Puerto Rico as a “true” Hispanic country (23). Pedreira (2005) read the economic crises of his times as the result of U.S. modernization projects, where speed and money are valued at the expense of quality and “indestructibility” (62). Pedreira (2005) argues that the U.S. modernization of Puerto Rico hindered the (Hispanic) cultural development and education of the island’s people (63). Nevertheless, Pedreira (2005) still considers Puerto Rico a fundamentally “Hispanic” (or Spanish) society: “The native-born Puerto Rican never renounced the Spanish part of his identity, but he always considered himself a Spaniard ‘from here’ with opinions and attitudes distinct from those ‘over there’” (56).

Although Pedreira depicts Puerto Rico as Spanish, he focuses much of his text on race mixture, which he presents as even more detrimental to Puerto Rico’s development than colonialism (indeed, he implies that race mixture may be the reason for colonialism in the first place). Pedreira (2005) begins his essay with a section called “The People and Their Significance,” in which he describes in detail the various contributions of indigenous, African, and Spanish groups to the Puerto Rican population. Throughout, Pedreira takes as his “underlying premise not only the determining power of race, but the inherent inferiority of the indigenous and African ‘races’ to the Europeans, the Spaniards in particular” (J. Flores 1993:33). Consequently, not only does Pedreira (2005) portray indigenous and African groups as having limited influences on Puerto Rican culture, but he also focuses on the Spanish proclivity for interracial sex as the root cause of race mixture as a “problem” in Puerto Rico: “Spanish scrupulousness gave in to one of their characteristic overindulgences that subscribed to the principle: The race that founds becomes fused and con-fused [*sic*]” (12).

According to Pedreira (2005), the three main elements of Puerto Rican race mixture (indigenous, African, and Spanish) have contributed distinct characteristics to the Puerto Rican personality. In his estimation, indigenous communities hardly influenced the development of Puerto Rican culture because of their “extermination” after the conquest (Pedreira 2005:12). Rather, Puerto Ricans are primarily descendents of Spanish and African ancestors; Spanish brought with them “intelligence and planning” that allowed them to rule over Africans, who Pedreira (2005) considers to be inferior, barbaric, and unable to think for themselves (12). Pedreira points to slavery as the system within which these characteristics fused into the Puerto Rican personality. He implies that the unequal power relations between Spaniards and Africans during slavery resulted in the economic and political problems Puerto Rico faced in the 1930s. Pedreira (2005) describes nineteenth century Puerto Rico as a time when “the ruling race [i.e. the Spanish] did the thinking for all,” such that the Africans and mixed race people would not have to “think about anything” or take charge of their own destiny (12). Pedreira (2005) ties this dynamic directly to his contemporary society, writing, “Today, a large part of the Puerto Rican masses is indentured, their innermost sense of personal liberty still held in pledge; it is at the root of our character” (12). Pedreira thus faults race mixture as the cause of continued colonial

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<sup>22</sup> Pedreira (2005) argues that climate and geography, especially the island’s small size and relative isolation, have been detrimental to Puerto Rico’s development and limited Puerto Ricans’ goals and cosmopolitanism (24, 26). His arguments differ from other Latin American authors of his time, including Gilberto Freyre (1956), who argued that Latin America’s “tropical” climate was an essential, positive characteristic that aided the region’s development.

relations in Puerto Rico, implying that those characteristics inherited from Africans prevent Puerto Ricans from the ability for self-rule.

Besides the African and Spanish elements of race mixture, Pedreira also outlines the characteristics of their racially mixed offspring. He describes the *mestizo/mulato*<sup>23</sup> as an inherently confused individual torn between the “docility” of his black parent and the “intelligence” of his white parent, “like a man who finds himself caught in the fire between two warring camps” (Pedreira 2005:13). As a result, the *mulato* “lacks the fervor to be a leader” (Pedreira 2005:13). Pedreira’s discussion of the *mulato* reveals his commitment to whitening that, although never explicitly stated in the text, is frequently implied not only in his cataloging of the individual elements of Puerto Rico’s race mixture, but also in his discussion of the *mulato*’s offspring. He writes, “Between the superior and inferior races stands the *mulato*, who will always belong to a fringe group with both racial dispositions, one of which will grow depending on whom he chooses for a subsequent pairing: *mestizo*, white or black” (Pedreira 2005:13). He later describes the result when a *mulato* “coupling again with the black” produces a “*grifo*, who has more robust constitution and effrontery than any other product of Puerto Rican ethnology, and who has been taking over the rugged work of our coasts and sugar mills” (Pedreira 2005:14).<sup>24</sup> Pedreira (2005) argues that of all the populations in Puerto Rico with black heritage, the *grifo* is most likely to fight for “full recognition of his abilities and for the egalitarian treatment that will ensure his share of opportunities in life” (15). Still, Pedreira (2005) portrays the *grifo* as someone who might “regress” back to his “African” characteristics, “cast[ing] doubt on his self-proclaimed equality, so that in some cases he proves to be a promising individual, in others a questionable one” (15). Within this context, Pedreira (2005) implies whitening as the only viable option for Puerto Ricans to resolve their colonial situation, as *mulatos* are too “confused” and “docile” while *grifos* too unstable and “questionable.”

Pedreira’s preference for whitening is most evident in his exaltation of the *jibaro*, or highland peasant. Lillian Guerra (1998) argues that in the mid-twentieth century, Puerto Rican elites drew on the figure of the *jibaro* as a way of seemingly including the large Puerto Rican masses within their construction of national identity while securing their own hegemony over the island. Consequently, during this time, the *jibaro* became the embodiment of a whitened national identity in Puerto Rico (Guerra 1998; Puri 2004:60).<sup>25</sup> In Pedreira’s categorical list of the various races in Puerto Rico, the *jibaro* stands as the saving grace of the island. He portrays *jibaros* as the direct descendents of “full-blooded Spaniards,” who, despite “losing battle on the island against disease and the climate,” became the ancestors of the majority of Puerto Rico’s population (Pedreira 2005:13). In fact, although Pedreira (2005) describes the initial Spanish settlers as engaging in interracial sex (thus producing the racially mixed population of Puerto Rico), he later argues that elite Spaniards attempted to maintain “purity of their blood,” while lower class Spaniards “started to mix with the black race,” thus portraying *jibaros* as the

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<sup>23</sup> Unlike many other Latin Americans, Pedreira (2005) uses *mestizo* and *mulato* interchangeably to refer to the offspring of white and black parents (13).

<sup>24</sup> Pedreira’s reference to the “coast” and “sugar mills” relates to Puerto Rico’s broader cultural topography, in which black populations are commonly considered to reside on the coastal areas of the island and whites to live in the mountainous interior. I provide a more detailed description of this cultural topography in the next chapter.

<sup>25</sup> Francisco Scarano (1996) argues that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Spaniards living in Puerto Rico also drew on a “*jibaro* masquerade” to further their own political agendas with rulers on the European continent.

descendents of not just whites, but also members of an elite class (12). Besides their biological lineage, Pedreira (2005) also depicts the *jibaro* as the best able to maintain a rural and traditional lifestyle, replete with Hispanic values and ideals, in the face of American modernization (13-14). Pedreira thus provides a stereotypical portrayal of the *jibaro* in Puerto Rico as a romanticized, culturally Spanish, and racially white national Puerto Rican figure.

Despite his description of African “docility” and “idiocy,” Pedreira does include a small space to celebrate Afro-Puerto Rican culture, such as his lauding of his contemporary, Luis Palés Matos, whose poetry described Afro-Puerto Rican life and culture (2005:41). Furthermore, although his own text reifies many problematic stereotypes of non-white racial groups, Pedreira (2005) also mentions that race mixture has produced minimal racial prejudice on the island. He argues that Puerto Ricans of all colors with great achievements are judged by their “exceptional qualifications” rather than the color of their skin (Pedreira 2005:15). He goes on to add that “We are obliged to lovingly include all groups that are genuinely worthy, without feeding that horrible beast called social prejudice” (Pedreira 2005:15). Like other theorists of racial democracy such as Freyre in Brazil, Pedreira contradicts himself by using race mixture as evidence of Puerto Rico’s racially harmonious society while simultaneously basing his interpretation of the effects of race mixture in Puerto Rico on racial stereotypes that reinscribe modern racial hierarchies.

In general, Pedreira includes many of the basic characteristics of racial democracy discourses in his text—race mixture, presumed racial tolerance, references to biological racism and Eurocentric bias—that other Puerto Rican and Latin American writers elaborated as well. Nevertheless, Pedreira differed from authors like Ortiz, Freyre, and his Puerto Rican colleague, Tomás Blanco, in his insistence that race mixture ultimately proved detrimental to the development of Puerto Rican national identity. Pedreira’s devaluation of race mixture prompted other members of the *Generación del 1930s* to respond. Tomás Blanco wrote several essays criticizing Pedreira’s thesis in *Insularismo*. Blanco was born in Puerto Rico in 1897, and lived in Spain in the 1930s while Fascism took hold in Europe (López-Baralt 2000:71). In 1935, Blanco published *Prontuario histórico de Puerto Rico* in direct response to *Insularismo*. In *Prontuario histórico de Puerto Rico* (2000), Blanco concluded that Puerto Rico did indeed have its own character limited not by race mixture or geography, but by the devaluation of Puerto Rican life and culture intrinsic to U.S. colonialism (426). Recently, literary critic Mercedes López-Baralt (2000) published Blanco’s notes that were discovered penciled into his copy of *Insularismo*. In his notes, Blanco vehemently disagreed with Pedreira’s assertion that Puerto Rico’s racial “fusion” has led to “con-fusion” (López-Baralt 2000:140).<sup>26</sup> Still, Blanco concurred with Pedreira’s portrayal of Puerto Rico as a culturally Hispanic country, claiming that the “purity” of this Spanish cultural background makes it more significant than biological race mixture to Puerto Rico’s development (López-Baralt 2000:150). These notes provided the foundation for Blanco’s 1942 publication, *El prejuicio racial en Puerto Rico*. In this text, Blanco’s portrayal of race mixture shares many of the same characteristics of other Latin American authors of his time — in particular, the assumption that race mixture has led to the biological and cultural whitening of Puerto Rico.

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<sup>26</sup> In fact, Blanco directly refutes Pedreira’s assertion of the “docility” of Africans, pointing to the slave revolts in Haiti, Dominican Republic and Cuba as evidence of African ability. However, Blanco concludes that Puerto Rico’s status as the “whitest of the Antilles” prevented similar revolts from taking place there (López-Baralt 2000:147).

The most obvious divergence from Pedreira in *El prejuicio racial en Puerto Rico* (1942) is Blanco's view that race mixture did not impede Puerto Rico's future. Instead, Blanco understood race mixture to be subsumed under an overarching Spanish culture and embodied by a white national subject, resulting in the absence of racial discrimination in Puerto Rico. For Blanco, this presumed lack of racism in Puerto Rico is a major distinction that makes the island superior to the U.S. and, in turn, delegitimizes U.S. colonialism (Jiménez Román 1996:22-23). Blanco (1942) begins with an in-depth comparison of racial prejudice in Puerto Rico and the southern United States. For Blanco, the United States constitutes the quintessential example of racial prejudice in the world, where he cites systemic racist practices, from segregation to derogatory language, which he considers absent in Puerto Rico (31). Instead, Blanco (1942) states that, "*En Puerto Rico no sabemos todavía muy bien lo que es el prejuicio racial*" [In Puerto Rico, we still don't know very well what racial prejudice is] (9). Similar to other Latin American scholars, Blanco (1942) attributes the perceived lack of racial prejudice to a variety of factors including Spaniards' exposure to the Moors prior to the conquest and a supposedly more benign system of slavery on the island than in the U.S. (27-28). In general, Blanco (1942) considers whatever prejudice that exists to be less violent than in the U.S., and more "social" (i.e. related to other factors like socioeconomic class) than "racial" (63).

Blanco (1942) also insists that a lack of racial prejudice in Puerto Rico is intimately tied to the historical process of race mixture. With this point, Blanco (1942) departs from Pedreira by describing race mixture as a manageable process that resulted in the progressive whitening of the population without any of the detrimental effects that Pedreira described. Blanco therefore does not detail the various racial categories or cultural contributions of indigenous and African groups in Puerto Rico; rather, he argues that indigenous and African blood has been "diluted" via *mestizaje* (Blanco 1942:35). To that end, Blanco (1942) repeatedly identifies Puerto Rico as a white, Hispanic nation with very minimal African or indigenous cultural influences:

*Nuestro pueblo tiene abundante sangre negra, aunque, en general, casi no existen negros puros, y aunque nuestra población de color está completamente hispanizada culturalmente y son muy escasas las aportaciones africanas a nuestro ambiente, salvo en el folklore musical...*

*...nuestro pueblo no es un pueblo negro ni sus prejuicios—raciales o de otra clase—son los prejuicios de un pueblo negro; sino los de una comunidad blanca más o menos modificados por las circunstancias peculiares del país. Poco importa, para el caso, la cantidad de sangre negra...*

*El pueblo de Puerto Rico vive dentro de las normas generales de la cultura occidental. Aunque la mezcla de negros y blancos es considerable, el elemento africano ha influido solo muy ligeramente sobre los rasgos culturales. Los prejuicios isleños son prejuicios comunes a la raza blanca en general. (51, 59-60, 62)*

[Our people have abundant black blood, although, in general, pure blacks almost do not exist, and although our population of color is completely culturally Hispanicized and African contributions to our environment are very scarce, save for musical folklore...]

...our people are not black people nor are their prejudices—racial or otherwise—prejudices of black people; rather, they are those of a white community more or less



modified by the peculiar circumstances of this country. The quantity of black blood, in this case, is of little importance...

The people of Puerto Rico live under the general norms of Western culture. Although the mixture of blacks and whites is considerable, the African element has only lightly influenced our cultural traits. The island's prejudices are common prejudices to the white race in general.]

In fact, Blanco (1942) claims that statistically, Puerto Rico is actually both biologically and culturally whiter than many southern U.S. states such as Georgia, Alabama, South Carolina, and Mississippi (52-53). By aligning Puerto Rico with the "general norms of Western culture," Blanco (1942) attributes Puerto Ricans with the "modern" sensibilities of Europe.

Blanco (1942) shares with Freyre (1956) and Ortiz (1995) an idea of race mixture as a defining characteristic of their respective countries that makes them morally superior to the United States because of the supposed lack of racial prejudice. While Pedreira (2005) sees the national Puerto Rican subject as a direct descendent of "full-blooded Spaniards," Blanco (1942) considers the national subject to be a racially mixed-but-white Puerto Rican who is culturally Spanish. Despite their differences, Antonio Pedreira and Tomás Blanco laid the framework for a Puerto Rican brand of "racial democracy" through their shared interpretations of the history of race mixture as resulting in a Hispanic identity. Like other Latin American authors of the time, their writings include the biological determinism inherent to theories of whitening and their portrayal of a racially egalitarian society motivated against the growing Fascism in Europe and racial segregation in the United States. Indeed, for Blanco, Pedreira, and other Puerto Rican writers of the mid-twentieth century, questions of national identity vis-à-vis the United States remained paramount as the "Americanization" of Puerto Rico continued.

### **Luis Palés Matos and *Afroantillanismo* in the 1930s**

Another contemporary of the *Generación del 1930s* is the poet Luis Palés Matos. Palés Matos is often praised for his descriptions of black life and culture in his poetry, especially at a time when other authors portrayed Puerto Rico as Spanish (e.g. see González Pérez 1987; Marzán 1995). Even Pedreira (2005) praised Palés Matos's work (41; Godreau 1999:294).<sup>27</sup> Palés Matos moved away from a Hispanophilic version of national identity, instead advocating a "*mulata*" national identity that centered on Afro-Caribbean aesthetics (González Pérez 1987:286, 288; Godreau 1999:295; Marzán 1995:518; West-Durán 2005:56).<sup>28</sup> Indeed, some literary critics have viewed Palés Matos's poetry as a direct response to the Hispanophilia of the *Generación del 1930s*, especially Antonio Pedreira (González Pérez 1987; López-Baralt 2000:86-95).

Born in 1898 in Guayama, Palés Matos witnessed the same entrenchment of U.S. colonial policies on the island as Pedreira and Blanco. Guayama, located on the southern coast of Puerto

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<sup>27</sup> In addition, Pedreira and other elite Puerto Ricans considered Palés Matos to be "white" (Godreau 1999:194).

<sup>28</sup> Some of Palés Matos's poems have similar themes to the *poesía mulata* of the *afrocubanismo* movement. Thus, Palés Matos has been compared to Nicolás Guillén of Cuba, who also focused on African-centered themes in his portrayals of Afro-Cuban life. For a detailed comparison of Palés Matos and Guillén, see González Pérez 1987.

Rico, is recognized as a predominantly black town with a long history of sugar cultivation (L. Figueroa 2005). Drawing from his experiences in an Afro-Puerto Rican town, Palés Matos published two books of poetry, *Azaleas* in 1915 and *Tuntún de pasa y grifería* in 1937. *Tuntún* in particular included many poems that exalted the “*afroantillana*,” or Afro-Antillean, character of Puerto Rico and the Caribbean more generally, including “*Pueblo Negro*” (Black People), “*Magestad Negra*” (Black Majesty) and “*Mulata-Antilla*” (Mulatta Antilles). In many of his poems, Palés Matos relies on imagery of Afro-Puerto Rican culture in addition to African words and references such as religious deities. Palés Matos had also published some of these poems in newspapers and literary magazines prior to the release of *Tuntún* in 1937 (Marzán 1995). Like the *Generación del 1930s*, Palés Matos emphasized race mixture between Spanish and African people on slave plantations in the nineteenth century as the basis of Puerto Rican identity (González Pérez 1987:288). However, Palés Matos viewed race mixture as producing a Caribbean-based “*mulata*” culture that thoroughly integrated both European and African heritage (Fequiere 1996; Godreau 1999:294; González Pérez 1987; Marzán 1995; West-Durán 2005).

Palés Matos’s depiction of Puerto Rico as a fundamentally “*mulata*” society made his writings dramatically different than others in the *Generación del 1930s*. Still, several scholars later criticized Palés Matos for rooting his *afroantillana* identity in stereotypes of blackness, particularly hypersexuality (Guisti Cordero 1996; West-Durán 2005; Zenón Cruz 1974). Juan Guisti Cordero (1996) classifies Palés Matos’s work as “*cultura negroide*” centered on “sensuality...and an appeal to the ‘primitive’” that did not differ significantly from portrayals of blackness by Pedreira (59). Likewise, Alan West-Durán (2005) argues that Palés Matos’s “Afro-Antillean world is highly mythologized, emblematic, and nonrealistic” (56). Indeed, Palés Matos reiterated many problematic stereotypes of blackness in his poetry. For example, one of Palés Matos’s famous poems in *Tuntún y Grifería*, entitled “*Mulata Antilla*” [Mulatta Antilles], describes the Caribbean region through the figure of a *mulata*, relying on several typical tropes of *mulata* hypersexuality. Among these are references to food (e.g. honey, milk, sugar), natural elements, and animals that are commonly associated with *mulata* sexuality (West-Durán 2005:57). Moreover, Palés Matos also frequently describes the *mulata*’s body as a metaphor for the landscape of the Caribbean; for example, when exalting the natural beauty of the Caribbean, Palés Matos proclaims, “*¡oh mulata! Tú me brindas/en la clara bahía de tu cuerpo/por los soles del trópico bruñida*” [oh *mulata*! In the clear bay of your body, you have offered me the suns of the burnished tropics] (Palés Matos 1995). Ultimately, Palés Matos’s reliance on images of nature and the body furthers primitivist depictions of black sexuality that divorce blackness from European modernity (Guisti Cordero 1996; West-Durán 2005).

Although his portrayal of a *mulata* Puerto Rico differed from the Hispanicized depiction promoted by his cohort in the *Generación del 1930s*, Palés Matos did not completely reject the Spanish aspect of Puerto Rican culture. In one interview, Palés Matos stated, “The Antillean<sup>29</sup> is a Spaniard with the mores and ethos of a mulatto and the soul of a black” (qtd. in West-Durán 2005:55). Despite his celebration of Afro-Puerto Rican culture, Palés Matos implies that Puerto Ricans are mostly biologically white (Spaniards) who have some cultural attributes from black communities. As Julio Marzán (1995) argues, Palés Matos’s poetry ultimately described the “obsessive and continual encounter of a white persona with a black heritage” (43). Indeed, in

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<sup>29</sup> Luis Palés Matos frequently uses “Antillean” to refer to the Caribbean region as a whole; however, on occasion, as in this quote, the “Antillean” specifically belongs to the Spanish-speaking Caribbean.

another interview, Palés Matos described the “black man” in his poetry as a “lyrical” man who reflects more of an “essence” than a reality (qtd. in Godreau 1999:299-300). This depiction of blackness as “essence” or the “other” thus lends itself to an exotification of blackness that reiterates many stereotypical and primitivist tropes of blackness.

On the one hand, Luis Palés Matos did not disrupt racial stereotypes of blackness, particularly in the realm of sexuality; on the other, his work represented a sharp and significant break with the Hispanophilic tendencies of the *Generación del 1930s*. As Alan West-Durán (2005) argues, “For the first time a publicly known figure not only pointed out but celebrated African contributions to the island’s language, music, food, sports, and social behavior” (55). In fact, his work was met with much criticism and outrage among many Puerto Ricans at the time (Fequiere 1996). Not only did Palés Matos insist on the centrality of African-based culture in Puerto Rican life, but his work also could be read as in invocation of diaspora. “*Mulata Antilla*,” for example, ends with a description of several Caribbean islands, including Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Dominica, all united by a “*mulata*” aesthetic (Palés Matos 1995). The diasporic turn in Palés Matos’s poetry also represents a critical departure from the insular version of blackness propagated by hegemonic discourses of racial democracy. Ultimately, Palés Matos’s refutation of the Hispanophilia of his time made a significant contribution in the definition of Puerto Rican identity.

### **Challenging Racial Democracy in the 1970s**

Many contemporary scholars of race in Puerto Rico have criticized the works of Blanco, Pedreira, Palés Matos, and others in the *Generación del 1930s*. According to Miriam Jiménez Román (1996), the first “serious challenge” to elitist constructions of racial democracy was presented in Isabelo Zenón Cruz’s *Narciso descubre su trasero: El negro en la cultura puertorriqueña* in 1974. Another important work was José Luis González’s 1979 essay “Puerto Rico: The Four-Storeyed Country.” Both authors prioritized African influences in their portrayals of a racially mixed Puerto Rican identity. While Palés Matos’s poetry provided a creative commentary on the impact of African-influenced cultures on Puerto Rican national identity, Zenón Cruz and González combined historical, sociological, and cultural analyses in an attempt to highlight and denounce the issue of racial discrimination that had been ignored by the *Generación de 1930s*. Their work exposes the contradictions within dominant constructions of racial democracy, emphasizing that the problem with racial democracy was not its reliance on race mixture, but rather the deployment of race mixture as a rhetorical strategy that maintains racial hierarchies.

Isabelo Zenón Cruz’s *Narciso descubre su trasero* (1974) is a two-volume exposé of both racism in Puerto Rico and the contributions of Afro-Puerto Ricans to the island. Zenón Cruz (1974) argues that Afro-Puerto Ricans have been neglected and erased from Puerto Rican history, beginning with his distinction between the terms “*negro puertorriqueño*” [Puerto Rican blacks] and “*puertorriqueño negro*” [black Puerto Ricans] (23). For Zenón Cruz (1974), these two terms carry with them discrete connotations about Afro-Puerto Rican inclusion within the nation; the term “*negro puertorriqueño*” assumes that “*puertorriqueño*” is an “adjective,” implying that Afro-Puerto Ricans are black first and Puerto Rican second (23). According to Zenón Cruz (1974), “*negro puertorriqueño*” thus identifies blacks as foreign to Puerto Rico, as

opposed to “*puertorriqueño negro*,” which refers to a Puerto Rican who happens to be black (23). In general, he argues that whiteness has historically defined Puerto Ricanness in the popular imagination:

*“la imagen que tenemos del puertorriqueño es blanca, de ahí que para identificar al blanco se escuche llana y simplemente ‘puertorriqueño’ y para identificar al negro, ‘negro puertorriqueño.’ Pero esto no justifica nada, meramente describe una injusticia más: hacer blanca la imagen para todos los puertorriqueños, habiéndolos de todos los matices imaginables”* (23).

[the image that we have of the Puerto Rican is white, and from there to identify whites, you hear plain and simply “Puerto Rican,” and to identify blacks, “black Puerto Rican.” But this does not justify anything, it merely describes one more injustice: making white the image of all Puerto Ricans, with all the imaginable mixtures that exist.]

In his insistence on clarifying these terms, then, Zenón Cruz rejects the whitened depiction of the Puerto Rican national subject represented by the *jibaro* of the *Generación del 1930s*.<sup>30</sup>

At the same time, however, Zenón Cruz considers race mixture a foundational aspect of Puerto Rican identity. Zenón Cruz (1974) writes:

*El negro no ha ‘mezclado con nosotros’ ni tampoco ‘vive física y espiritual con nosotros’ porque ni el antillano negro en general ni el puertorriqueño negro en particular son extranjeros en su tierra caribeña o boricua. El francés, el inglés, o el italiano se han ‘mezclado con nosotros’; pero no el negro, porque el negro, lo mismo que blanco y el indio, es nosotros. Ni siquiera sería correcto afirmar que es parte de nosotros porque la cultura no es un queso, es una estructura dinámica cuyos elementos forman una totalidad tan integrada que no sería tampoco exacto hablar de elementos, porque la separación de dichos elementos es producta de una abstracción mental que no corresponde a realidad. Verdaderamente podemos distinguir, pero en realidad no separar* (47).

[The black man has not ‘mixed with us’ nor does he ‘physically and spiritually live with us’ because neither the Afro-Antillean in general nor the black Puerto Rican in particular are strangers in their Caribbean or Puerto Rican land. The French, the English, or the Italian has ‘mixed with us’; but not the black, because the black, same as the white or the Indian, is us. It would not even be correct to affirm that it is a piece of us because the culture is not a pie, it is a dynamic structure whose elements form a totality so integrated that it would not be right to talk of elements, because the separation of those said elements is a product of a mental abstraction that does not correspond to reality. Truthfully, we could distinguish, but not separate.]

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<sup>30</sup> It is worth noting that Zenón Cruz (1974) also criticized the work of Luis Palés Matos, arguing that Palés Matos emphasized the “primitive” stereotypes of blackness, thus divorcing it from the “Puerto Rican” (50). Moreover, he argues that Palés Matos’s defense of a “*cultura mulata*” added to the “*discriminación contra el negro contemporáneo—o contra sus antepasados de Africa, envolviendo indirectamente a aquél*” [discrimination against contemporary blacks—or against their African ancestors, indirectly involving them] (46).

Therefore, while Zenón Cruz criticizes the image of “white” Puerto Ricans, he also defines Puerto Ricans as a mixture of black, indigenous, and white. His observation of national culture as a “totality” rather than distinct elements calls for racial democracy to equally acknowledge African, European, and indigenous contributions to Puerto Rican identity and culture.

In 1979, José Luis González made a similar argument in his essay, “Puerto Rico: The Four-Storeyed Country.” González (1993) defines Puerto Rican culture as a mixture between “Taíno Indian, the African and the Spanish”-- but “of these three roots the one that is most important for economic and social—and hence cultural reasons—is the African” (11). He criticizes the constructions of a Spanish-oriented Puerto Rican national culture by Puerto Rican elites (both pro-independence and pro-annexation leaders), pointing to the popular culture of the “masses” as the “true” national culture of Puerto Rico. In fact, rather than the whitened *jibaro* national figure depicted by Pedreira (2005), González (1993) argues that enslaved Africans forced to resettle to Puerto Rico are the “first Puerto Ricans,” and, consequently, Puerto Rican culture is essentially “Afro-Antillean in character, defin[ing] us as just another Caribbean population” (10, 11). González (1993) measures the impact of blackness onto Puerto Rican culture through relatively tangible factors, such as food and dress, as opposed to the abstract, “lyrical” blackness described by Palés Matos (11).

González’s emphasis on an Afro-Caribbean-based Puerto Rican national culture directly refutes the Hispanic national culture propagated by Pedreira and Blanco; at the same time, he still considers race mixture as a fundamental part of Puerto Rico’s national identity. Namely, he criticizes the exaltation of the *jibaro* as the quintessential Puerto Rican figure when he writes:

The literary ‘*jibarismo*’ of the elite has been nothing else at bottom than that class’s statement of its own racial and social prejudice. And so in the Puerto Rico of our own day, where the *jibaro* has virtually ceased to have any demographic, economic, or cultural significance, the myth of the Puerto Rican as essentially a *jibaro* stubbornly survives—whenever the old conservative elite, whether openly or covertly racist, sets pen to paper. And this at a time when it is really the *proletarian Puerto Rican of mixed race who increasingly typifies popular society!* (González 1993:26; emphasis added).

For González, it is race mixture within the working class that forms the basis of Puerto Rican culture. Throughout his text, González (1993) emphasizes that, historically, working class Puerto Ricans have been thoroughly racially integrated, beginning with the large numbers of enslaved Africans interacting with poor white farmers in the nineteenth century (11). However, rather than interpret race mixture as a whitening process, González considers race mixture as producing a fundamentally Afro-Caribbean culture because working class whites adopted Afro-Puerto Rican cultural practices as a result of their interactions with black communities. González thus reverses the dominant understanding of race mixture, arguing that race mixture produced an African-based rather than Spanish-based Puerto Rican identity.

Zenón Cruz (1974) and González (1994) point out the contradictory ways in which racial democracy deploys rhetoric of racial inclusion to further practices of racial exclusion. González (1994) and Zenón Cruz (1974) take advantage of these contradictions in racial democracy to revise the dominant portrayals of a racially mixed-but-white Puerto Rican identity. And yet, the new interpretations of race mixture espoused by Zenón Cruz (1974) and González (1994) problematically entail a simple reversal of the hierarchies embedded within racial democracy.

That is, both Zenón Cruz (1974) and González (1994) consider race mixture fundamental to the development of an African-based identity in Puerto Rico. On the one hand, this reversal involves a serious critique of the devaluing of African cultural influences in the development of Puerto Rican identity. On the other, the works by Zenón Cruz (1974) and, especially, González (1994) do not necessarily extend to a call for a racially egalitarian society in Puerto Rico. Moreover, their arguments are in danger of reproducing the static images of the racial triad that forms the basis for hegemonic depictions of Puerto Rican racial democracy. Despite these shortcomings, however, Zenón Cruz (1974) and González (1979) made important interventions that laid the groundwork for subsequent research about racial discrimination in Puerto Rico.

## Conclusion

In 1998, the *Comisión de Derechos Civiles de Puerto Rico* [Commission for Civil Rights of Puerto Rico] published a pamphlet entitled *¿Somos Racistas?* [Are we racist?]. Founded in June of 1965, the *Comisión de Derechos Civiles* is a government organization that works to educate and promote the civil rights of all Puerto Ricans, such as the right to vote, freedom of speech, and the right to live free of discrimination (1998:51). In this pamphlet, the *Comisión de Derechos Civiles* questioned the idea that a true racial democracy existed in Puerto Rico and pointed to ideas surrounding race mixture as creating a brand of racism distinct from the U.S.: “*La verdad es que en nuestro país el racismo coexiste con el mestizaje y la confraternización racial y que podemos ver sus manifestaciones tanto en el seno de nuestras familias como en la vida pública*” [The truth is that in our country racism co-exists with *mestizaje* and racial fraternization and that we can see its manifestations as much in the bosom of our families as in public life] (*Comisión de Derechos Civiles* 1998:19-21). Indeed, besides the *Comisión de Derechos Civiles de Puerto Rico*, many scholars such as Miriam Jiménez Román (1996, 2005, 2008), Isar P. Godreau (1999, 2000, 2002a; 2002b; 2006, 2008), Juan Flores (1993, 2009), Arlene Torres (1998), Jorge Duany (2002), Zaire Dinzey Flores (2005, 2008a), Ángel Ortiz García (2006) and others have worked to debunk the so-called racial democracy in Puerto Rico, pointing out racist practices in government policies, cultural practices, and everyday life.

Scholars of race relations elsewhere in Latin America and the Caribbean also refuted the claims of racial democracy, portraying the ideology as a “myth” that obscured reality (e.g. see Skidmore 1993 and Wade 1997 for a discussion of these critiques). While such critiques are certainly valid, the emphasis on “the elitist nature of myths of racial democracy” and other discourses of hybridity has sometimes “ignored the capacity of subordinate groups to appropriate and manipulate the nation-state’s cultural project to their own advantage” (de la Fuente 1999:42). As Shalini Puri (2004) argues, the contradictions inherent to discourses of hybridity have “also offered oppositional constituencies the opportunity to seize upon the slippages, contradictions, and accommodations of ruling-class rhetoric” (50). These “slippages” yield opportunities for individuals to create new understandings of blackness that refute the modern racial hierarchies that undergird discourses of hybridity such as racial democracy.

Stuart Hall (2003a) claims that “cultural change is thus a matter of de- and re-accentuation” of the constitutive elements of specific discourses of hybridity (34). The “accentuation” of the European presence over the African in discourses of hybridity is not fixed, but rather shifts as the contradictions within racial democracy discourses become exposed.

Cultural practices have become one space where the process of de-accentuation and re-accentuation within discourses of hybridity has manifested. For instance, George Yúdice (2003) describes funk in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, as a music that provides an alternative for black, impoverished and disenfranchised youth to claim a public space by drawing on African diasporic popular music. Likewise, Cuban rap also allowed Afro-Cuban youth to voice their experiences of marginalization and racism decades after the Revolutionary government claimed that racism had been eradicated from the island (Fernandes 2003; Pacini Hernández and Garafolo 1999/2000; West-Durán 2004). Similarly, as I will show in subsequent chapters, reggaetón emerged from the “slippages” in Puerto Rican discourses of racial democracy.

As I will demonstrate in the rest of this dissertation, reggaetón offers youth in Puerto Rico a vehicle through which to participate in an African diasporic space that in turn offers new possibilities to imagine blackness. Despite its diasporic orientation, however, reggaetón responds to the specific development of racial democracy in Puerto Rico and the particular systems of racialized exclusion it produces. Therefore, as Peter Wade (1993) has argued, constructions of racial democracy are spatially constituted. In Puerto Rico, certain images of blackness have been associated with specific places, a process that I term “emplacements of blackness.” In some cases, these emplacements of blackness maintain the hegemonic discourse of racial democracy because they both isolate and “authenticate” certain constructions of blackness within very specific geographical boundaries compared to the rest of the presumably more whitened Puerto Rican population. At other times, these emplacements of blackness render visible the contradictions inherent to dominant constructions of racial democracy, particularly the co-existence of racial discrimination with the assumption of a racially harmonious society. The genealogy of racial democracy that I presented in this chapter is necessary for understanding the ways that discourses of racial democracy have been constructed to promote a whitening bias in Puerto Rico. In the process, racial democracy discourse has produced certain images of blackness that reinforce modern racial hierarchies. In the next chapter, I will describe how different entanglements of race and place in Puerto Rico both maintain hegemonic discourses of racial democracy and offer possibilities to create alternative understandings of Puerto Rican national identity that link blackness and Puerto Ricanness in new ways.

### Chapter Three: Mapping Puerto Rico's Emplacements of Blackness

In June of 2005, I lived in San Juan while conducting fieldwork about bomba, an African-derived music and dance from Puerto Rico typically considered emblematic of the African “third root” of Puerto Rican culture (Barton 1995; Barton 2002; Godreau 1999; Dávila 1997).<sup>1</sup> As part of my fieldwork, I attended bomba performances throughout the San Juan area, and interviewed bomba musicians. One of the places I was especially interested in visiting was Loíza, a town in the northeastern coast of Puerto Rico close to San Juan that has often been described as the epicenter of Afro-Puerto Rican culture (e.g. see Godreau 2006; Giusti Cordero 1996; Pérez 2002; Barton 1995; Dávila 1997; Hernández Hiraldo 2006). Many important bomba musicians are based in Loíza, including members of the Cepeda and Ayala families.

On one particular day in late June, I traveled to Loíza via *carro público*, a privately owned taxi that travels between towns and cities in Puerto Rico along predetermined routes, picking up and dropping off passengers along the way. I boarded the *público* in Río Piedras, in the southern part of San Juan. *Públicos* traveling from Río Piedras to Loíza most frequently follow the busy Route 3 road, passing through the cities of Carolina and Canóvanas before turning north onto Route 187 to arrive in Loíza. On that particular day, the passengers on my *público* in Río Piedras were of different racial groups; however, as we continued east on Route 3, the passengers on the van were almost exclusively black or with dark complexions.

Although in the United States many people assume I am racially mixed, in Puerto Rico I am considered white. As a result, one young man riding alongside me in the *público* seemed especially confused when I remained in the van as we turned onto the road to Loíza.

“What are you doing here? Did you miss your stop?” he asked.

“No, I’m going to Loíza.”

“Loíza! Why would someone like you go there? Usually white people never go there,” he explained.

I described my interest in studying bomba. He seemed to accept my explanation, since, in his opinion, “If you want to study bomba, you have to go to Loíza.”

In March of 2003, one of Puerto Rico’s most popular newspapers, *El Nuevo Día*, included a series of articles entitled “*130 Años: Igualdad Racial*” (130 Years: Racial Equality). A picture of a handshake between a black hand and a white hand drawn in the middle of a large circle was positioned in the center of each article’s text. The articles commemorated the 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the abolition of slavery in Puerto Rico, and centered on the question, “*A 130 años de la abolición de la esclavitud, ¿dónde está Puerto Rico en materia de igualdad racial?*” [130 years after the abolition of slavery, where is Puerto Rico in terms of racial equality?] (Rodríguez and López Cabán 2003). To answer this question, articles included opinion pieces, human-

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<sup>1</sup> Bomba is a musical practice characterized by antiphonal vocals accompanied by a trio of drums; two drums keep the same rhythmic structure while one drum, the *seguidor*, follows the steps of a dancer, much like rumba.



interest stories, and coverage of conferences and symposiums about race relations in Puerto Rico. In general, the coverage portrayed Puerto Rico as a nation struggling to overcome racism. Ultimately, journalists Sandra D. Rodríguez and Cynthia López Cabán concluded that racism in Puerto Rico, “*Todavía sigue atrás*” [It is still backwards].

Among the group of articles in the exposé was one about racism in schools, entitled “*Barreras racistas sin superar entre los estudiantes*” [Students do not overcome racist barriers]. Journalist Sandra D. Rodríguez Cotto covered a panel about African history and contributions to Puerto Rican culture presented at a school in the Hato Rey neighborhood of San Juan. She included quotes from students regarding the existence of racism in Puerto Rico at school and in society more generally.

One of the students Rodríguez Cotto interviewed was Ovidio Acevedo, who claimed that he experienced discrimination based on where he lived. He said, “*A mí me discriminan por ser de Carolina, no por el color [de piel]. Piensan que soy cafre y me dicen ‘tú eres de Carolina de donde son los reggaetóners.’*” [They discriminate against me because I am from Carolina, not because of the color of my skin. They think that I am *cafre* and they tell me, ‘You are from Carolina, where the reggaetón singers are from.’] (qtd. in Rodríguez Cotto 2003). Carolina is a large municipality just to the east of San Juan, and home to many housing projects important in the development of reggaetón. Indeed, during my fieldwork, many individuals told me to focus my research in Carolina because they believed it is the epicenter of reggaetón culture. Contemporary Puerto Rican slang defines “*cafre*” as someone who is from the urban housing projects or neighborhoods. In this context, Ovidio’s comments reveal how race, place and popular culture become conflated.

These examples illuminate how place and race are mutually constitutive in Puerto Rico. In the first case, Loíza has historically been constructed as the epicenter of Afro-Puerto Rican culture and folklore on the island. As a result, in the eyes of my fellow *público* passenger, studying bomba, which has often served as a metonym for the African “third root” of hegemonic discourses of racial democracy, required a visit to Loíza. In the second instance, Ovidio responded to questions regarding his experience with racism in terms of his residence in Carolina, with reggaetón and being “*cafre*” simultaneously indicating both blackness and the urban housing projects. Each case reveals how particular signifiers, including cultural practices such as bomba and reggaetón, become *emplaced* within specific locations on the island (Loíza and Carolina, respectively). Moreover, different cultural practices come to represent specific and divergent understandings of blackness such that bomba epitomizes the folkloric blackness that signifies the African component of racial democracy, and reggaetón conjures up a host of stereotypes related to abject blackness and embodied by someone who is “*cafre*.” Consequently, as these cultural practices become emplaced in different locations, so too do the various understandings of blackness which they represent. Ultimately, these examples reveal the multiple conceptions of blackness that are emplaced within Puerto Rico in ways that sometimes support and at other times challenge dominant constructions of racial democracy. This chapter maps out these various emplacements in Puerto Rico, and the work they do vis-à-vis racial democracy discourses.

The dominant discourse of racial democracy is typically defined, maintained, and transformed within a broader “racial/spatial order” (Rahier 1998; Wade 1993). Following the interventions made by Peter Wade (1993) in his seminal work on Colombia, I map the Puerto Rican racial/spatial order onto a “cultural topography.” This cultural topography details the emplacements of blackness in Puerto Rico, paying particular attention to the power relations embedded within them. On the one hand, different racial groups are positioned in relation to one another and within particular hierarchies of power throughout the cultural topography. For example, the emplacement of a blackness considered emblematic of an African element within racial democracy is juxtaposed to the rest of the presumably racially mixed-but-white island as a way to maintain Eurocentric hierarchies. As a result, these emplacements reveal one of the fundamental contradictions of discursive constructions of racial democracy: black places must be included within a broader national discourse to account for one of the “original” elements of race mixture at the same time that they are constructed as places of difference in relation to the rest of the racially mixed-but-white nation. The emplacements of blackness that signify the African element of racial democracy become “naturalized,” such that the particular signifiers of blackness associated with those places are taken for granted as “real” or “authentic” (Forman 2002; Lefebvre 1991; Massey 1994). Therefore, the young man in the *público* claimed that I had to visit Loíza in order to see “real” bomba performance. Authenticating these emplacements reinforces racial democracy, isolating blackness as a folkloric or “antiquated” element that is both necessary for the development of a racially mixed-but-white Puerto Rican nation and relegated to the past.

While certain emplacements may reinforce racial democracy, others provide spaces of possibility to challenge it. Indeed, emplacements of blackness sometimes hold multiple meanings depending on particular social and historical contexts. As the boundaries of emplaced blackness become contested, cultural practices emerge that communicate different racial identities and affinities. As evidenced by Ovidio’s comments regarding racism, in Puerto Rico, *caseríos*, or housing projects, are marked as black places. Dominant representations of the emplaced blackness in *caseríos* reproduce stereotypical tropes of blackness, such as hypersexuality or a propensity for violence. Within this context, *caseríos* are viewed as places that require control and regulation, generally by the state.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, as opposed to Loíza, which signifies a blackness that fits neatly with the narrative of racial democracy, the dominant image of abject blackness attributed to *caseríos* is divorced from the ideal characteristics of the Puerto Rican nation. At the same time, cultural practices such as reggaetón have developed from the *caseríos*, challenging many of the dominant tropes of abject blackness associated with the housing projects. Though contradictory, these multiple understandings of blackness coexist within the same place, revealing the ongoing contestation over the boundaries of emplacements of blackness. Mapping out the cultural topography of Puerto Rico involves taking into account the circulation of divergent understandings of blackness within the same place.

This chapter considers these multiple emplacements of blackness and the work that they do vis-à-vis the hegemonic discourse of racial democracy in Puerto Rico. I begin by outlining

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<sup>2</sup> One example of regulation of *caseríos* is the *Mano Dura contra el Crimen* campaign initiated by Puerto Rican governor Pedro Rosselló. The *Mano Dura* campaign involved increased policing of the *caseríos* by both Puerto Rican police and the U.S. National Guard. I describe this incident in more detail later in this chapter, and in a subsequent chapter about the impact of *Mano Dura* on the development of Puerto Rican reggaetón.

the theories of space and place that have informed my definition of emplacements of blackness and the mapping of these emplacements within Puerto Rico's cultural topography. I then examine historical narratives of slavery in Puerto Rico that have emplaced blackness along the coastal regions of the island; these narratives are important for understanding how the production of this history reiterates a racially mixed-but-white national identity on the island. I consider how this history of general emplacement of blackness on the coast has been displaced via the discursive production of Loíza as the contemporary "place where black people live," the epicenter of Afro-Puerto Rican life and culture, and, subsequently, the primary signifier of Puerto Rico's African "third root" within hegemonic racial democracy discourses. While Loíza has become the quintessential black place in Puerto Rico, other emplacements of blackness exist on the island, too. These emplacements do a different kind of work vis-à-vis racial democracy, sometimes reinforcing the ideals of racial democracy and, at other times, providing possibilities for articulating a new Puerto Rican identity with African diasporic connections. Through mapping the various emplacements of blackness throughout Puerto Rico onto the island's "cultural topography," I argue that the entanglements of race and place in Puerto Rico may sustain discourses of racial democracy; however, as these entanglements shift, spaces arise that yield new understandings of blackness which counter the modern biases intrinsic to racial democracy discourses.

### **Constructing Space, Place, and Race**

In his seminal work, *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre (1991) argued that "(Social) space is a (social) product" (26). Following Lefebvre's argument, space cannot be considered a simple, innocuous backdrop for everyday life. Rather, space becomes constituted within social relations that, in turn, imbue spaces with particular power relations and multiple levels of meaning (Forman 2002; Lefebvre 1991; Massey 1994; D. Moore 2005; Wade 1993). Indeed, as Doreen Massey (1994) argues, space must be considered as "a moment in the intersection of configured social relations" that is always in flux (265). Space therefore serves as the symbolic site of action constituted by social relations. Just as power relations shift within social interactions due to changing historical and social contexts, so do the power relations within different spaces. For example, as I will demonstrate in subsequent chapters regarding reggaetón's development, Puerto Rican youth's engagement in an African diasporic space offered them opportunities to imagine and articulate new understandings of blackness and, in the process, alternative definitions of Puerto Rican identity that depart from the whitening bias intrinsic to discourses of racial democracy.

As a site of symbolic action, space is actualized in place. Murray Forman (2002) defines place as the specific physical locations where people live and experience social relations; he writes that place "is defined by its closeness and proximity to individuals and groups and by its localized character, distinguished by its contrast with the distant and external character of abstracted space or of other distinct places" (25). Place is therefore the concrete, physical site where space is manifested. Because space is continuously in flux, so too are understandings of place; as Doreen Massey (1995) argues, place is therefore not defined by a linear "internal history," but rather, "is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus...each 'place' can be seen as a particular, unique, point of their intersection" (Massey 1994:155). As the physical manifestation of space, then,

places come to represent particular social categories or identities, such as race. Consequently, blackness can become emplaced, or attributed to specific places, in different ways based on the distinct articulation of social relations at any given time.

Space and place are linked via particular signifiers of social relations that become emplaced within specific locations. These signifiers serve as what Lefebvre (1991) has termed “representational spaces,” that is, the “associated images and symbols” that help define particular places (39). Within this context, certain cultural practices serve as symbols of particular places (Forman 2002; D. Moore 2005); such is the case when bomba is popularly recognized as representative of Loíza. However, one single place may have multiple meanings, and individuals experience that place depending on their own identities (Massey 1994:7-8; D. Moore 2005:21). As symbolic representations of specific places, cultural practices also allow individuals to express their own subjectivities in ways that may indicate alternative understandings of their specific “place-identities.” As I will demonstrate in this dissertation, despite reggaetón’s connections to other African diasporic sites, the music developed in part as a response to very localized experiences of racial and class discrimination in Puerto Rico, providing a vehicle through which *caserío* residents could articulate alternative renderings of blackness that disputed this marginalization. Examining cultural practices therefore allows for an interrogation of the social relations embedded within spaces that are manifested in specific places at particular points in time.

In his discussion of race and regional differentiation in Colombia, Peter Wade (1993) maps out racial identities in Colombia within what he terms as a “cultural topography.” A cultural topography charts the interconnected processes that produce entanglements of race, space, and place. While a cultural topography includes physical geographies, it also incorporates the social relations that create the multiple meanings of place. Consequently, mapping out the cultural topography of Puerto Rico involves both highlighting the various emplacements of blackness on the island, and interrogating the different, and contested, relations of power embedded within these emplacements. Highlighting the multiple, and often discrepant, emplacements of blackness within a singular place exposes the contradictions inherent to dominant discourses of racial democracy.

### **Locating Blackness on the Coast**

In his 1974 discussion of the African influence in Puerto Rican language, Manuel Alvarez Nazario outlines different terms for racial identities and popular phrases regarding race mixture. He also includes a relatively lengthy list of derogatory jokes, phrases, and comments related to blackness in Puerto Rico. Among them, he lists:

*“Tener (una persona blanca) parientes en la Costa. Es expresión antigua, hoy desaparecida, que recoge Ledru<sup>3</sup> a fines del XVIII como, ‘el insulto más grande que*

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<sup>3</sup> Ledru is a French traveler who went to Puerto Rico in 1795 and recorded his observations about the people and culture of the island.

*podiera el orgullo dirigir a un criollo*<sup>4</sup>, refiriéndose a la mayor concentración de la gente de color por las zonas costaneras del país” (362).

[(A white person) *Having relatives on the Coast*. An old expression, non-existent today, that Ledru recorded at the end of the eighteenth century as, ‘the biggest insult that one could direct at the pride of a *criollo*,’ referring to the large concentration of people of color in the coastal zones of the country.]

This eighteenth-century “insult” reflects the popular recognition of the emplacement of blackness within coastal regions of Puerto Rico (e.g. see Alvarez Nazario 1974; Mintz 1974; Ortiz García 2006; Zelisky 1949). The emplacement of blackness in Puerto Rico’s coastal areas results from the development of the island’s sugar plantation economy there during the nineteenth century (L. Figueroa 2005; Mintz 1974; Scarano 1984; Zelisky 1949). Examining this history provides necessary background for understanding the development of Afro-Puerto Rican communities and the more general positioning of blackness within constructions of Puerto Rican national identity.

The history of slavery in Puerto Rico differs from many other Caribbean countries because enslaved Africans never constituted the majority of the Puerto Rican population. In fact, at its peak, the enslaved population of Puerto Rico only reached 12% of the island’s total population (L. Figueroa 2005; Godreau 1999; Mintz 1974; Scarano 1984). Slavery existed throughout Puerto Rico, including sugar plantations on the coast, small coffee plantations in the interior, and urban areas such as San Juan (e.g. see Negrón Portillo and Mayo Santana 1992; Scarano 1984). Furthermore, free people of color, who Jay Kinsbruner (1996) defines as those individuals of African descent considered both non-white and legally free, constituted the majority of Puerto Rico’s population throughout much of the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> These free people of color lived in urban areas as well as the interior of the island where, like many working class whites, they engaged in subsistence agriculture (Kinsbruner 1996; Zelisky 1949). In addition, there is some evidence of maroon communities in the mountainous interior of the island, and records of arrests of runaway slaves have been found in towns like Utuado and Adjuntas (Ortiz García 2006:59). Still, the majority of slave labor was located on the coastal regions of the island, leading to a popular recognition of an emplaced blackness in the region.

The first enslaved Africans arrived in Puerto Rico in the early sixteenth century, and slavery continued until abolition in 1873. Unlike other countries in the Caribbean, sugar cultivation did not become the primary industry in Puerto Rico until relatively late, in the mid-nineteenth century. Prior to the growth of the sugar industry, most agricultural industry in Puerto Rico centered on coffee, tobacco, and cattle (Godreau 1999:153). Subsistence farming was also a major economic activity in Puerto Rico prior to the 1700s; Francisco A. Scarano (1984) notes that these small farms included a more integrated slave society, where few enslaved Africans lived on each individual farm, often working alongside white and free farmers, and manumission was frequent. However, with the growth of the sugar industry beginning in the late 1700s and

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<sup>4</sup> In the eighteenth century, the word “*criollo*,” or “*creole*,” referred to people of European descent (see Scarano 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Jay Kinsbruner (1996) identifies these free people of color as individuals who had either been manumitted or purchased their own freedom; the children of free women; and free people of color who had emigrated from other areas of the Caribbean.

increasing steadily throughout most of the nineteenth century, large plantations were established in Puerto Rico, sparking the growth of the enslaved African population. For example, while 5,037 enslaved Africans were recorded in Puerto Rico in 1776, the number increased to 32,000 in 1828 (Godreau 1999:154; Kinsbruner 1996:2).

Several political and economic issues throughout the Caribbean impacted the growth of the Puerto Rican sugar industry. Most important, the Haitian Revolution, beginning in 1791 and ending in 1804, transformed the locus of the sugar plantation economy in the Caribbean. The French colony Saint Domingue (Haiti) had been one of the major sugar producing areas in the world, and with its independence, other islands including Puerto Rico had the opportunity to become major sugar exporters (Godreau 1999). The early nineteenth century also saw the fledgling United States increasing its international trade, and Puerto Rico became the main exporter of sugar to the new nation, sparking further growth of the sugar industry on the island (L. Figueroa 2005; Scarano 1984). Immigration of plantation owners from throughout the Caribbean to Puerto Rico as a result of the *Cédula de Gracias*, implemented by the Spanish crown in 1815, also accelerated the Puerto Rican economy (L. Figueroa 2005; Godreau 1999; Scarano 1984). The *Cédula* offered a plot of land for every white male settler to Puerto Rico, and added a partial plot for every enslaved African he brought with him (L. Figueroa 2005:47). It also included tax breaks on property (including slaves) for fifteen years after settlement in Puerto Rico, and opened up the island's ports to more trade (L. Figueroa 2005:47; Godreau 1999:153; Scarano 1984:18). The result was unprecedented immigration to Puerto Rico, not only from Spain, but also by plantation owners and Europeans from elsewhere in the Caribbean who relocated to Puerto Rico, usually with their enslaved laborers (L. Figueroa 2005:47, 56-57).

As the plantation economy grew, so did the enslaved population in Puerto Rico. Many of the enslaved people brought to Puerto Rico came from other areas in the Caribbean, especially the French colonies of Martinique and Guadeloupe, and neighboring islands like St. Thomas and St. Croix (Alvarez Nazario 1974; Scarano 1984). Some enslaved Africans were transported directly from Africa, although this was a more clandestine operation because, at the time that Puerto Rico's enslaved population began growing significantly, the British had already ended their slave trade and were poised to abolish slavery in their colonies (Scarano 1984). Most of the enslaved African and Afro-Caribbean population resided on the southern coasts of the island where the plantation economy was strongest (Alvarez Nazario 1984; L. Figueroa 2005; Mintz 1974; Ortiz García 2006; Scarano 1984; Zelisky 1949). More specifically, the cities of Mayagüez and Ponce, located respectively on the western and southern coasts, became large, politically significant urban areas, and the nucleus of Puerto Rico's sugar industry (L. Figueroa 2005; Godreau 1999; Scarano 1984). Other areas along the south coast, most notably Guayama, also became important centers of the sugar industry with large concentrations of black populations; indeed, in 1828, enslaved African, Afro-Caribbean, and Afro-Puerto Rican people constituted nearly half of Guayama's population (L. Figueroa 2005:53-55). Therefore, the growth of the plantation economy directly influenced the settlement of black populations along the coastal regions of the island.

In their recent discussion of the curricular incorporation of the history of slavery in Puerto Rican public schools, Isar P. Godreau, Mariolga Reyes Cruz, Mariluz Franco Ortiz, and Sherry Cuadrado (2008) have noted that slavery is frequently presented through a series of three "maneuvers" that emphasize the "limited" importance of not only slavery, but Afro-Puerto Rican

history in general to the understanding of Puerto Rican identity. These maneuvers include: maneuvers of “silence” that results in the “erasure” of Afro-Puerto Rican history from the curriculum; maneuvers of “trivialization” that “downplay” the issues of violence and racism surrounding slavery; and maneuvers of “simplification” that “reduce, essentialize, and equate blackness with slavery” (Godreau *et al.* 2008:119). Ultimately, Godreau and her colleagues find that these maneuvers in the public school curricula regarding Puerto Rican slavery tend to reinforce the whitened Hispanic ideals of racial democracy discourses.

The discursive emplacement of blackness on the coastal regions contributes to these maneuvers in several different ways. First, as mentioned above, the focus on the history of coastal slavery constitutes a “maneuver of silence” that erases the histories of free people of color and enslaved people in other areas of the island, especially San Juan and the mountainous interior. By silencing the historical presence of free people of color in the interior of the island, the interior became imagined as a predominantly white place in relation to the coast. The contrast between “black coast” and “white interior” was especially important in the construction of the “white” *jibaro*, or highland peasant, exalted by many mid-twentieth century Puerto Rican elites as the embodiment of Puerto Rican national identity. Many Puerto Rican elites considered the mountainous interior of Puerto Rico to be isolated from the modernization projects prevalent in the urban areas of the island; therefore, *jibaros* were thought of as more “authentically” Puerto Rican than urban or coastal people who had been “corrupted” by modernization projects (Dávila 1997:72; Guerra 1998). For example, in *Insularismo* (2005), Antonio Pedreira represents the *jibaro* as the embodiment of Puerto Rican identity, drawing on both spatial and racial characteristics:

Our humble farmer, this *criollo*, this *jibaro*, bent over a hoe from sun to sun, his life exposed to the elements, battered by deprivation and hookworm, yet always enduring despite a deficient diet. He is a fellow who also lives for the present, who works out of necessity, who resorts to gambling in order to gather in a moment the resources he thinks are impossible to obtain with persistent work. Generous and courteous, hospitable and fun-loving, *he has had to find refuge in shrewdness to protect himself from being tyrannized by city slickers and competitors from the black provinces on the coast.* Our *jibaro* is by nature mistrusting and shy, and although benevolent on his own, suspicious and astute. *Fed up with unkept promises and proposals laid aside, he has had to fall back on his keen mind to put a stop to the fraud and excesses of the city* (13-14; emphasis mine).

Pedreira’s portrayal of the *jibaro* includes not only the perceived racial differences between the rural “white” interior and the urban “black” coast, but also ascribes particular characteristics to each place that reinforce this dichotomy. For Pedreira, the rural *jibaro* is hard-working and moral, uncorrupted by “the fraud and excesses of the city” and the “black provinces on the coast.” These spatial contrasts between the rural/moral/white interior and the urban/corrupt/black coast presented by Pedreira reinforce the discursive boundaries that emplace blackness on the coast, presenting blackness as located within Puerto Rico, but also fundamentally distinct from the rest of the island.

Indeed, this separation between coastal blackness and interior whitened Puerto Ricanness also furthers the “maneuver of simplification” that Godreau, Reyes Cruz, Franco Ortiz, and Cuadrado (2008) identify. As an isolated figure, the *jibaro* is portrayed as “devoid of recognizable African and Taíno components” (Dávila 1997:72). As the embodiment of national

identity, the *jibaro*'s whiteness de-emphasizes the contributions of indigenous and African cultural practices in Puerto Rico's national culture. In his description of a southern plantation in Puerto Rico, Sidney Mintz (1974) suggests that, when he conducted his research in the 1940s, Puerto Ricans generally recognized the prevalence of Afro-Puerto Rican cultural practices along the coastal regions of the island due to the history of plantation life there (57-58).<sup>6</sup> The popular emplacement of Afro-Puerto Rican cultural practices within the coastal regions of Puerto Rico thus reinforces the perceived limited impact of African-derived cultural practices on the development of Puerto Rican national culture overall (Dávila 1997:70).

Consequently, the emplacement of blackness along the coastal regions of Puerto Rico creates a recognizable association between race and place that is distinguished from the whitened *jibaros* of the interior. As a result, coastal blackness becomes the counterpoint to a national *jibaro* figure. While the southern coast is still popularly recognized as one of the black places within Puerto Rico, the northeastern town of Loíza is now considered the most significant black place on the island. This emplacement of blackness in Loíza draws attention away from the southern coast of the island, displacing the history of Puerto Rico's system of plantation slavery in the southern coast. Nevertheless, the emplacement of blackness on the coastal regions of Puerto Rico has had significant consequences for the development of national identity, reinforcing the embodiment of Puerto Ricanness by the construction of the whitened *jibaro* figure.

### **Emplacing Blackness in Loíza**

From 1948 until 1951, Puerto Rican archeologist Ricardo Alegría conducted research in Loíza about the Fiestas de Santiago Apóstol, an annual religious festival that includes three processions of St. Santiago Apóstol's figure, and a carnivalesque atmosphere in which individuals wear costumes including *vejigantes* and parade in the streets.<sup>7</sup> More generally, Alegría (1954) sought to examine the African influence in Puerto Rico, and selected the Fiestas de Santiago Apóstol as the object of his study because, in his estimation, it exhibited the most ancient Hispanic-Catholic [*hispano-católica*] practices and most obvious retentions of African customs and ways of life on the island (xxii). Loíza had originally been a Taíno settlement until Spaniards arrived in the sixteenth century and developed three large sugar plantations there (M. Pérez 2002:24). While the southern coast had the largest plantations throughout the nineteenth

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<sup>6</sup> In this particular instance, Mintz (1974) writes specifically about plantations that existed after abolition of slavery. Mintz (1953) argues that there are three distinct periods of plantation life in Puerto Rico: the "slavery-and-*agregado* plantation system" of the mid-nineteenth century; the "family-type *hacienda* system" of the late nineteenth century; and the "corporate land-and-factory combined system" after the US take-over of Puerto Rico. He focuses on the latter. Although his ethnography occurred some fifty years after slavery, it is significant that Mintz found many of the same popular conceptions of coastal life in post-abolition plantations eras, revealing the ongoing salience of the emplacement of blackness via the plantation system in coastal Puerto Rico.

<sup>7</sup> In Loíza, *vejigantes* are masks made out of coconuts considered to represent the Moors in the story of Santiago Apóstol. These masks are also considered evidence of the African presence in Puerto Rico. Other towns, including Hatillo and Ponce, also have *vejigantes*, but their masks are made of paper maché as opposed to coconuts. Other costumes worn during the Fiestas to portray certain characters include the *caballero*, the *viejo*, and the *loca*. For more information on the Fiestas, see Moira Pérez's Ph.D. dissertation, "The Place of Abandonment: Geography, Race, and Nature in Puerto Rico" (2002).



century, Loíza's plantations remained important sugar-producing industries in the mid-twentieth century, as U.S. American corporations purchased many of them after 1898 (M. Pérez 2002). Loíza thus had a substantial black population, history of plantation slavery, and an economy similar to the southern coast. However, compared to the southern coast, Alegría (1954) argued that Loíza was an isolated town with an almost exclusively black population (using the 1950 census, Alegría estimated that Loíza was 87% black), and therefore the area with the highest concentration of African-derived cultural practices found anywhere on the island.

To further his argument, Alegría (1954) included a history of Loíza that marked the town as the area with the largest percentage of enslaved Africans in Puerto Rico (3). Alegría (1954) continued by portraying Loíza as an isolated place that maintained a "traditional" way of life, as opposed to the other, more "modern" regions of the island. Alegría (1954) wrote: "*Loíza Aldea, como generalmente se la conoce ahora, es un pueblecito olvidado y alejado de los progresos igualizadores de la civilización maquinista, que vive su vida apacible y monótona, manteniendo antiguas creencias y costumbres, como si ignorara el paso de los siglos*" [Loíza Aldea, as it generally known today, is a forgotten town and distant from the egalitarian progress of industrialized civilization, that lives a tranquil and monotonous life, maintaining ancient beliefs and customs, as if ignoring the passing of the centuries] (5). With this depiction of Loíza as the isolated epicenter of Afro-Puerto Rican culture, Ricardo Alegría set the groundwork for the emplacement of blackness within Loíza, making it the primary marker of African influences within racial democracy.

Alegría eventually went on to become the first director of the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña (ICP), an "autonomous" organization with ties to the government charged with defining and maintaining Puerto Rican national culture (Dávila 1997:37-38, 61). ICP was founded in 1956, just eight years after Luis Muñoz Marín became the first popularly elected governor of Puerto Rico, and four years after the island ratified its own constitution as a "free associated state" of the United States. Arlene Dávila (1997) argues that this process led to the development of a "cultural nationalism" in Puerto Rico where Muñoz Marín's government strove to define a Puerto Rican national culture without advocating for political sovereignty. Within this context, the Puerto Rican legislature approved Law 89, which established the ICP to "conserve, promote, enrich and disseminate the cultural values of the *pueblo* of Puerto Rico and bring about their broadest and most profound knowledge and appreciation" (Law 89, qtd. in Dávila 1997:39). In 1956, Alegría became the first director of the ICP, and remained in that post for eighteen years.

Ricardo Alegría held an important role in developing the foundations of what has now become popularly recognized as Puerto Rican national culture. In general, Alegría expressed a profound commitment to "racial democracy," claiming to incorporate the Spanish, indigenous, and African elements of Puerto Rican identity within the institutionalization of national culture (Alegría 1973). However, the ICP's initial program maintained a strong Hispanic bias for several years, focusing on Spanish dance, music, poetry and literature (Dávila 1997:62).<sup>8</sup> In the

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<sup>8</sup> For example, in the first five years of ICP's existence, the organization sponsored three presentations on Afro-Puerto Rican poetry out of sixty-two poetry presentations; the others focused mainly on Spain (Alegría 1960). Likewise, out of eighty-three sculpture exhibits, only one featured African art (Alegría 1960). ICP's musical program emphasized western classical music, ballet, and "folklore" consisting of *trovadores*, or music from the

1970s, the ICP incorporated more folklore into the program, including limited presentations of bomba (Dávila 1997:64-67; Alegría 1973). As the ICP attempted to institutionalize more African-derived Puerto Rican cultural practices, Loíza became the privileged black place within Puerto Rico; indeed, Dávila (1997) notes that Loíza is one of the only areas where “African Caribbean cultural elements...are officially recognized” (93).<sup>9</sup> Within the eastern region of Puerto Rico, which the ICP generally considers to have relatively little historical or cultural significance, Loíza has remained the northeastern town with the most investment from the ICP (Dávila 1997:92-93). This investment is partly due to Loíza’s perceived isolation. As the ICP sought to incorporate more folklore into its program, the organization established criteria of “authenticity” that determined which folkloric groups would receive funding and represent the ICP (Dávila 1997:74). For African-based cultural practices, the ICP stressed that bomba groups include distinct African elements in their music to best represent the African component of discourses of racial democracy (Dávila 1997:75). As a supposedly isolated place, Loíza therefore came to represent the “embodiment of Puerto Rico’s African tradition in its most folkloric version” (Dávila 1997:93). Alegría’s initial portrayal of Loíza as an isolated black place eventually became institutionalized via the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña as the quintessential marker of Puerto Rico’s African “third root” within representations of racial democracy discourses.

Popular representations reinforced the boundaries around the emplacement of blackness within Loíza, constructing the town as a “place of Otherness” within Puerto Rico (M. Pérez 2002:16). The production of Loíza as a “black place” ascribed *loiceños* (the residents of Loíza) with particular essentializing characteristics of blackness, portraying them as an exclusively black population with direct ties to Africa. Participation in certain African-derived cultural practices, namely bomba, added to the image of *loiceños* as individuals who represented an essentialized blackness that differed from the racially mixed-but-white Puerto Ricans who lived in the rest of the island. As Moira Pérez (2002) describes, “That non-African elements should materialize in Loíza appears as a ‘contradiction,’ a jarring break in the municipality’s presumed homogeneity” (73). Moreover, the emplaced blackness in Loíza was specifically marked as an “antiquated” folkloric blackness that influenced, as opposed to being constitutive of, Puerto Rican culture.<sup>10</sup> In the case of Loíza, discourses about race and place reinforced each other, creating strict boundaries around Loíza that made the town synonymous with blackness.

U.S. Census statistics reflect the idea of Loíza being a predominantly black place in relation to the rest of Puerto Rico. On the 2000 Census, approximately 81% of Puerto Ricans identified themselves as white, and only 8% identified as “Black African American.”<sup>11</sup> The

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mountainous interior of Puerto Rico that emphasizes different kinds of guitars such as the *cuatro* or *triple* (Alegría 1960; Alegría 1973). These programs reflect the Hispanic bias of the ICP and its institutionalization of Puerto Rican national culture.

<sup>9</sup> Although Arlene Dávila (1997) points out that Loíza has become the privileged site of institutionalized Afro-Puerto Rican folklore, the ICP also invested some resources in presentations of *bomba* and *vejigantes* in the southern coastal city of Ponce as well (70). See also Barton 1995; Godreau 1999; Godreau 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Isar P. Godreau (1999, 2006) has described similar processes of emplacement and essentializing blackness in the San Antón neighborhood of Ponce; while Loíza represents a black place on a national scale in Puerto Rico, San Antón serves the same purpose within the localized representations of Ponce.

<sup>11</sup> Since 1990, the US Census has collected racial statistics about Puerto Rico; however, the Puerto Rican government did not collect statistics about race from 1960 to 1990 because they considered such statistics irrelevant

overwhelming majority of Puerto Ricans (approximately 96%) chose to identify as one race, and the majority of these individuals selected white. The “Two or more races” category, more consistent with the race mixture implied by racial democracy discourse, only accrued 4.2% of the overall responses. The municipality of Loíza, however, diverged from this trend. The majority of *loiceños* on the 2000 Census, approximately 66%, identified themselves as black, and only about 20% selected white. Indeed, Loíza has a higher percentage of individuals who identify as black on the census than any other municipality on the island, thus reinforcing its reputation as the “black place” in relation to the rest of Puerto Rico.

*Loiceños’* blackness is also emphasized by the town’s geography itself. Although Loíza is located relatively close to San Juan, throughout much of Loíza’s history few roads and limited public transportation options have connected it to the nearby urban areas of San Juan and Carolina (M. Pérez 2002). Loíza’s relative isolation has led to a further portrayal of the municipality as the “center of tradition,” a predominantly African place with limited influences from other more “mixed” or “Hispanic” areas of Puerto Rico (Hernández Hiraldo 2006; M. Pérez 2002). As a result, the emplacement of blackness in Loíza produces a *loiceño* subject who is considered the direct descendent of Africans (Hernández Hiraldo 2006:45). Raúl Ayala, a local artisan and member of the bomba group Hermanos Ayala described Loíza’s connections to Africa in his description of the racial make-up of the town’s population:

*En Loíza, específicamente, este es un pueblo que está en el noreste de la isla de Puerto Rico, y es uno de los pueblos con más arraigos africanos, herencia africana. El noventa y nueve por ciento de la población es de origen, es negra, por decir así, por dar un por ciento. No puede decir el cien, pero el 99.9% es de origen africano. Ahora han sido más, diluyendo un poco porque con la entrada de otra gente, de “gente blanca,” que sé yo, entre comillas, pero básicamente, su origen es de Africa (Personal Communication, 14 June 2005).*

[In Loíza, specifically, this is a town that is in the northeast of the island of Puerto Rico, and it is one of the towns with the most African roots, African heritage. Ninety-nine percent of the population is of origin, is black, to say it like that, to give it a percentage. You can’t say one hundred percent, but 99.9% is of African origin. Now it has been more, diluting a little with the arrival of other people, “white people,” you know, in quotation marks, but basically, its origin is from Africa.]

Because *loiceños* are considered the direct descendents of Africans, implying a lack of racial mixture, they serve as the embodiment of the “pure” African element within Puerto Rican racial democracy. Therefore, the emplacement of blackness in Loíza produces an essentialized black subject who embodies the “pure African” influence in discursive elaborations of racial democracy.

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(Duany 2002:252). Census statistics prior to 1960 reveal a progressive “whitening” of the Puerto Rican population (Duany 2002:252). Puerto Ricans also used the U.S. Census in 2000; therefore, it should be noted that, considering race as a social construct that is context-specific, U.S. racial categories do not correspond exactly to Puerto Rican racial classifications on the island. Nevertheless, the fact that Puerto Ricans chose “white” as a category reflects an overall trend that marginalizes other identities.

The dominant perception of Loíza's connections to Africa is bolstered by its reputation as the epicenter of Afro-Puerto Rican culture. The presence of several important bomba musicians, including the Ayala family,<sup>12</sup> as well as the renowned Afro-Puerto Rican painter Samuel Lind, reinforces the image of Loíza being the only place where Afro-Puerto Rican cultural practices are maintained. Bomba itself has become a signifier of blackness within Puerto Rico's racial trilogy, and the reputation of Loíza as the center of bomba performance and authenticity thus reinforces Loíza's blackness (Barton 1995; Barton 2002; Barton 2004; Dávila 1997). Raúl Ayala describes the importance of Loíza to bomba's development:

*Ahora la bomba se está tocando en muchos sitios. Antes la bomba se tocaba nada más en Loíza y quizás en Ponce. De hecho, los últimos cuarenta años, cincuenta, cuarenta años, el único pueblo de toda la isla en Puerto Rico donde siempre se bailó y se ha bailado la bomba, como expresión de pueblo, ha sido Loíza. No es Ponce ni Mayagüez, ni ningún--eso sí se bailaba en el pueblo, pero con el correr del tiempo desapareció. Aquí, no, aquí todavía continúa. Aquí hay sitios donde los domingos, algunas veces, tú encuentras bailes de bomba--no, solamente tú puedes tocar un tambor cuando ya la gente..se arremolina, y aquí baila todo el mundo. Se lleva en la sangre (Personal Communication, 14 June 2005).*

[Now *bomba* is played in many places. Before, bomba was only played in Loíza, and maybe in Ponce. In fact, the last forty years, fifty, forty years, the only town on the whole island of Puerto Rico that always danced and has danced bomba, as an expression of the people, has been Loíza. Not Ponce, or Mayagüez, or any other town—they did dance it in the towns there but with time, it disappeared. Here, no, here it still continues. Here, there are places where on Sundays, sometimes, you find *bailes de bomba*--no, you just have to play the drum and the people are already gathering around, and here everybody dances. It's in their blood.]

Ayala emphasizes *loiceños*' "inherent" ability to perform bomba; interestingly, he argues that Loíza's bomba is more authentic than that of Ponce and Mayagüez, corresponding to the displacement of the southern coast by Loíza's emplacement of blackness in the popular imagination. The *loiceño* families involved in bomba have played a very important role in the development of bomba. Still, Loíza is not the only place where bomba is performed. Rather, bomba is a dynamic musical practice, with diverse rhythms and dances, and popular in Mayagüez, Ponce, Guayama, Santurce, and elsewhere (Barton 1995; Barton 2002). As Halbert Barton (1995) notes, the idea that Loíza is the *only* place in Puerto Rico where bomba is practiced reflects the salience of racial stereotypes on the island rather than actual historical fact (111). Nevertheless, the emplacement of blackness within Loíza also locates Afro-Puerto Rican cultural practices there and, in the process, isolates Afro-Puerto Rican culture from the rest of the more "Hispanicized" Puerto Rican national culture.

Loíza's perceived homogenous blackness is thus reified by popular conceptions of *loiceños*' "rural" and "traditional" way of life, and the prevalence of Afro-Puerto Rican folkloric practices there. As Moira Pérez (2002) argues, Loíza has been "othered" within a "spatialization

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<sup>12</sup> The Ayala family is also known for creating *vejigantes*. Their store is still located on the main road that runs through Loíza, and they hold regular *bombazos*, or bomba dances, and sell *vejigantes* throughout the year.

of difference” in Puerto Rico (143). The emplacement of blackness within Loíza portrays *loiceños* as the embodiment of an antiquated, folkloric blackness that has influenced Puerto Rican national identity while still remaining outside of the modern and racially mixed nation. Loíza represents a particular kind of blackness that can be recognized as part of the national imagination of Puerto Rico without disrupting the hegemony of racial democracy discourse.

### **Emplacing Blackness a lo Urbano**

While the emplacement of blackness in Loíza has been institutionalized as part of racial democracy, other emplacements of blackness exist as well. Doreen Massey (1994) argues that, because place and space are socially constructed, some places may emerge as an “unintended consequence” of the changing dynamics of social relations (266). Stuart Hall’s (1980) concept of articulation is useful for considering the “unintended consequences” in the production of place. Hall (1980) uses articulation to describe how the intersections of different social processes, including changing political and economic structures, at specific moments in history sometimes create unforeseen possibilities for new formations to emerge (see also Guilbault 2007). The articulation of different social processes at particular moments in time shifts the entanglements of race and place, and, as a result, produces new identities. In Puerto Rico’s cultural topography, the different articulations of social relations allows for multiple understandings of blackness to be simultaneously emplaced within one location. *Caseríos*, or urban housing projects, have been marked as black places within Puerto Rico; however, the meaning of emplacement of blackness within *caseríos* has changed over time as the articulation of shifting social relations modified the initial objectives of state-run housing programs.

The twentieth century saw rapid industrial development in Puerto Rico spurred by U.S. corporate interests on the island, resulting in mass migration both to major cities within Puerto Rico and to the United States (Santiago-Valles 1996). Migration within the island, especially to San Juan, led to the establishment of large shantytowns throughout the city, so much so that they constituted the majority of residential growth on the island in the mid-twentieth century (Tyrrell 2008:74). To address the problem, and to serve as a test-case for future New Deal policies of the 1930s, the Puerto Rican and U.S. governments built large housing developments that they hoped would both eliminate the growth of shantytowns and encourage working-class Puerto Ricans to adopt more “modern” values (Dinzey Flores 2007; Tyrrell 2008). Such values would be emphasized via a series of requirements that residents had to meet in order to live in the housing projects, such as being healthy with no contagious diseases, not having a criminal record, and preferably being married with children (Tyrrell 2008:80). Furthermore, these housing developments were located near middle-class neighborhoods to encourage residents to learn from their neighbors and adopt similar values (Dinzey Flores 2005; Dinzey Flores 2007; Dinzey Flores 2008a; Tyrrell 2008). With this purpose in mind, housing developments became marked as “non-modern” places that contained non-white, working class subjects who, with the appropriate direction, could eventually become “modern” Puerto Rican subjects.

The construction of housing developments continued into the mid-twentieth century, with the development of even larger multi-family dwellings throughout urban areas, the *caseríos* (Dinzey Flores 2008a). Still, the problem of slums and overcrowded working class urban areas remained. As a result, Muñoz Marín’s government “officially” renamed *caseríos*

“residenciales” and “viviendas” in an effort to reduce the stigma that had been attributed to the term “caserío” (Dinzey Flores 2007:478). Furthermore, the government sought to reinforce the idea that these residences were temporary, transitional communities, where families would continue to absorb the values of their middle class neighbors and eventually become lifted out of the working class (Dinzey Flores 2007:481). As a result, the image of the *caserío* residents as individuals who could potentially be integrated into the Puerto Rican state continued through Muñoz Marín’s administration, which ended in 1965.

However, while *caseríos* were initially conceived as temporary housing, families began staying in the developments more permanently (Dinzey Flores 2007). As a result, representations of *caseríos* and their residents changed. In particular, unprecedented levels of violence in urban Puerto Rico, especially San Juan, during the 1980s and 1990s, transformed the image of *caserío* residents as individuals with the potential to become “modern” citizens into criminalized outlaws who needed to be contained. Media coverage of criminal activity racialized the perpetrators as predominantly working-class, black male youth, and spatialized their activities within the *caserío* (Dinzey Flores 2005:33; Santiago-Valles 1996). Governor Pedro Rosselló’s *Mano Dura contra el Crimen* [Hard Hand against Crime] campaign targeted *caseríos*, using the U.S. National Guard to police these places as well as constructing large gates around the housing developments to “contain” residents (Dinzey Flores 2005).<sup>13</sup> At the same time, *Mano Dura* included a social service component to be implemented once the violence in *caseríos* subsided, thus continuing the previous objective of teaching residents “modern” values so they could eventually become productive citizens (Dinzey Flores 2005).

These moves to both police and separate the *caserío* from the rest of the population reinforced stereotypes of *caserío* residents as black, working class, violent and potentially threatening to the “modern” and “civilized” society in the rest of the island (Dinzey Flores 2005; Dinzey Flores 2008a; Santiago-Valles 1996). This construction of *caseríos* is analogous to Murray Forman’s (2002) description of the production of the “inner city” in the United States; he writes, “When mobilized in particular contexts, then, the term ‘inner city’ implicitly refers to racialized images or racially inflected conditions of danger, violence, and depravity that can be contrasted with the ideals of calm, safety, and security attributed to nonurban or suburban spaces” (Forman 2002:43). The discursive production of *caseríos* as places of delinquency and criminality simultaneously produced an image of *caserío* residents as black, working class subjects who did not ascribe to modern Puerto Rican values. Ultimately, such images reinforced the discursive emplacement of an “abject” blackness within the *caseríos*.

The slang word “*cafre*” refers to something or someone that is “from the *caserío*,” usually in a derogatory way. As Verónica, a middle class, white twenty-three year old woman describes,

**Verónica:** *Cafre... es de caserío. Pero aquí es de una conotación... aquí es mala. No es insulto... pues depende de como lo digas. Porque si tú lo dices a alguien, “Qué cafre,” tripiando, como “Ah, qué loca, qué cafre”... Pero si de ahí te lo toma en personal, ya es*

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<sup>13</sup> The policies implemented during the *Mano Dura* campaign were integral to the formation of reggaetón. I will describe them in greater detail in the next chapter about the creation of underground music, the precursor to reggaetón.

como un insulto. ¿Entiendes? Pero eso es siempre como llaman “cafre” a la gente del caserío, porque son gente con menos educación, con una manera de vestir... las mujeres son demasiadas.... o sea que las mujeres se hacen las putas. O sea, son de las cosas que... o sea, que no me gustan. Pero se visten de su manera, y hay que respetarla.

**Petra:** Y aparte de la ropa, ¿hay otras cosas?

**Verónica:** Son... bien malhablados. Eso de, del revolú... de dondequiera que se metan siempre buscan problemas. O sea, los muchachos siempre quieren ser de los más machos, y las mujeres ya que se tumba a un hombre, les engañan. Que está con un rapero, que salió con otro rapero, con otro rapero. Pues nada. Una ridiculez que tú no tienes ni idea.

[**Verónica:** *Cafre*...is from the *caserío*. But here there is a connotation...here it is bad. It is not an insult...well it depends on how you say it. Because if you say it to someone, “How *cafre*,” tripping, like “Ah, how crazy, how *cafre*”...Well if from there you take it personal, then it is like an insult. Do you understand? But it is always like they call the people from the *caserío* “*cafre*,” because they are people with less education, with their way of dressing...the women are too much...or it is that the women are like whores. Or like, they do things that...or like, I don’t like them. But they dress their way and you have to respect them.

**Petra:** And besides their clothes, are there other things?

**Verónica:** They’re...very foul-mouthed. That is, *del revolú*...wherever they go they always look for problems. Or like, the boys always want to be the most macho, and the women, as soon as they sleep with a man, they cheat on them. They are with one rapper, and then go out with another rapper, or another rapper. But anyway. You have no idea how ridiculous it is.]

Verónica’s description of *cafre* exemplifies the general negative connotation and typical use of the term. To be “*cafre*” is to occupy an urban black place visually signified by the gates and projects of the *caserío*, and marked by several different stereotypes associated with abject blackness (e.g. hypersexuality or violence).<sup>14</sup>

However, the emplacement of abject blackness within *caseríos* provided an opportunity to view the contradictions inherent to dominant discourses of racial democracy. Since the emplacement of folkloric blackness in Loíza supposedly represented the singular blackness that could be incorporated into “racial democracy,” the abject blackness associated with *caseríos* had to be constructed as fundamentally outside of the boundaries of Puerto Rican national space. This was also crucial considering that abject blackness represented qualities that were considered distinct from the respectability of Puerto Ricanness. In the efforts to contain abject blackness within *caseríos*, however, the Puerto Rican government contradicted some of the fundamental premises of discourses of racial democracy. For if Puerto Rico were a fundamentally racially

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<sup>14</sup> It is interesting to note that when one looks up “*cafre*” in the *Oxford Spanish Dictionary*, two definitions are listed: (1) “(de *África*) Kaffir” and (2) “idiot, moron, lout, punk.” I do not know how *cafre* changed from referring to members of the Kaffir ethnic group in Africa to “idiots” and “morons”; however, the etymology of the word is very telling in terms of *cafre*’s associations with blackness.

mixed society (save for the residents of Loíza), then how could communities recognized as black exist within the island's urban centers? Moreover, the policies enacted as part of the *Mano Dura* campaign entailed the reproduction of many racist stereotypes of blackness. Despite the so-called "racial democracy" that existed in Puerto Rico, *caserío* residents were subject to racism, evidenced in their everyday experiences with racial profiling, police brutality, employment discrimination, and other racist practices. As I will describe in more detail in the next chapter, reggaetón emerged out of this context. During the late 1980s and 1990s, underground, the precursor to reggaetón, portrayed life in the *caserío* and criticized the Puerto Rican government for promoting racist, classist, and corrupt policies. Beyond this critique of the government, underground and reggaetón also expressed a fundamentally new understanding of blackness informed by Puerto Rican youth's integration of diasporic resources from elsewhere in the African diaspora (Brown 1998). As a result, underground and reggaetón offered new entanglements of race and place that rejected the isolated emplacements of blackness in Loíza or the *caseríos*, and produced new understandings of the links between blackness and Puerto Rican identity.

Consequently, the articulation of social, economic, and political processes throughout the twentieth century resulted in the emplacement of blackness within *caseríos* in Puerto Rico's urban areas. While *caseríos* were originally conceived as temporary housing with the ultimate goal of "modernizing" their residents, changing economic and political relations resulted in the establishment of more permanent communities in *caseríos*. This "unintended consequence" caused the emplacement of abject blackness within *caseríos*. This emplacement of blackness in turn produced two racialized identities related to the *caserío*. On the one hand, the image of the *cafre* produced via state-sponsored housing policies represented those individuals who could not be accommodated by the discourse of the "modern," "civilized" and racially mixed Puerto Rican subject. As such, they were located within the Puerto Rican nation but were not necessarily "authentically" Puerto Rican because they presumably required a certain amount of "modernization" to be fully incorporated into the nation. On the other hand, the image of *caserío* residents presented in underground and reggaetón attempted to redefine their identities as modern subjects. The expressions of blackness within reggaetón and underground not only included a renegotiation of the relationship between blackness and Puerto Ricanness, but also an exposure of the political and social processes of exclusion inherent in the emplacement of blackness within *caseríos*. In this way, multiple ideas about blackness became emplaced within *caseríos* in ways that sometimes maintained and at other times challenged hegemonic discourses of racial democracy.

### **Emplacing Blackness Outside of Puerto Rico**

Blackness has been emplaced in distinct locations throughout Puerto Rico, each with different positions in relation to the broader discourse of racial democracy on the island. At the same time, blackness is also emplaced "elsewhere," or outside of the island (Godreau 2000). Within Puerto Rico, immigrant communities from the Dominican Republic have been marked as "black," and Nuyoricans (i.e. Puerto Ricans from New York) have been considered "blacker" than the rest of the Puerto Rican population. The attribution of blackness to places located outside of Puerto Rico's geographical boundaries maintains a distinction between Puerto Ricanness and blackness because they represent the absolute counterpoint to Puerto Rico's



racially mixed-but-white national identity. The increasing conflation of blackness with Dominicans and Nuyoricans allows for a visible contrast between the presumably whitened Puerto Ricans and black “others.” Consequently, these various, sometimes contradictory, emplacements of blackness work together to maintain hegemonic discourses of racial democracy.

Dominican immigrants constitute one of the main populations that have been identified as “black” in contemporary Puerto Rico. Dominicans have steadily migrated to Puerto Rico since the fall of the Trujillo regime in Santo Domingo in the 1960s (Duany 2005; Martínez-San Miguel 1998). While political turmoil in the Dominican Republic precipitated much of the early emigration from Santo Domingo, more recently, economic opportunities have prompted immigration to Puerto Rico (Duany 2005). Puerto Rico is seen by many Dominican immigrants as a stepping-stone to migration to the United States; for others, cultural similarities between the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, especially shared Spanish-language, and the ability to earn salaries in U.S. dollars makes Puerto Rico an attractive destination (Duany 2005; Iturrondo 2000; Martínez-San Miguel 1998). Furthermore, the Dominican Republic’s relatively close geographic location to the western coast of Puerto Rico makes it easier to get there than the United States, especially because a dangerous trip on a *yola*, or raft, between the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico generally takes a little over twenty-four hours (Duany 2005; Iturrondo 2000). Dominican immigrants to Puerto Rico work primarily in the service sector as domestic servants, food-service workers, construction workers, and taxi drivers, among other jobs (Duany 2005; Iturrondo 2000). The overwhelming majority of Dominican immigrants in Puerto Rico live in the San Juan metropolitan area, especially in Río Piedras and Santurce (Duany 2005).

The Dominican Republic itself ascribes to a discourse of hybridity as the basis of national identity that presents Dominicans as a mixture of indigenous and Spanish heritage, marking blackness as property of neighboring Haiti and therefore “foreign” to Dominican identity (Torres-Saillant 2000). However, in Puerto Rico, Dominicans are generally considered “black” (Duany 2005; Iturrondo 2000; Martínez-San Miguel 1998). Indeed, much like anti-Haitian sentiment functions in the Dominican Republic, the increasing conflation between Dominicans and blackness by many Puerto Ricans furthers the idea of blackness as “foreign” or distinct from Puerto Ricanness (Martínez-San Miguel 1998).

Omar, a twenty-year old Dominican, was raised partly in Brooklyn, New York, and partly in Río Piedras. While Omar does not identify himself as “black” (Omar identifies as “Latino”), he would be interpolated as “black” in the United States and Puerto Rico due to his phenotype. According to Omar, Dominicans in Puerto Rico are mainly identified by skin color and other cultural attributes:

**Petra:** *¿Cómo pueden identificar a un dominicano, o si estás en la calle, cómo se puede averiguar si eres dominicano o si eres boricua?*

**Omar:** *Se ve la diferencia de los aspectos. Se ve la diferencia. [Points at face and arm to indicate his skin color]. Esta es la única diferencia. Los movimientos también, si alguien mueve diferente. También diferencias de como hablamos, el acento. Cosas así.*

[**Petra:** How can [Puerto Ricans] identify a Dominican, or if you are in the street, how can they be sure that you are Dominican or you are Puerto Rican?

**Omar:** They see the difference in appearance. They see the difference. [*Points at face and arm to indicate his skin color*]. That is the only difference. Movements, too, if somebody moves differently. Also the differences in the way we speak, our accent. Things like that.]

Omar's comments reveal the general conflation between blackness and Dominican identity in Puerto Rico. Therefore, in relation to the rest of the supposedly racially mixed-but-white Puerto Rican population, Dominicans' blackness in Puerto Rico marks them as foreign subjects.

The attribution of blackness to the Dominican Republic extends to the emplacement of blackness within Dominican immigrant neighborhoods in Puerto Rico, bolstering the popular distinction between Puerto Ricanness and blackness. The blackness emplaced within Dominican neighborhoods is considered foreign and fundamentally "outside" of Puerto Rico, even more so than *caseríos*.<sup>15</sup> For example, Odalys, a twenty-one year old Puerto Rican college student, describes her opinion of Río Piedras as a place where Dominicans have virtually taken over, making the town almost non-Puerto Rican:

**Odalys:** *Pienso que los puertorriqueños aceptan a los dominicanos porque muchos están trabajando aquí. Pero los dominicanos a pesar de que están aquí y que viven de lo que ganan aquí, no se aceptan a los puertorriqueños. Eso sí yo pienso.*

**Petra:** *¿Por qué piensas eso?*

**Odalys:** *Sí porque, por vivir aquí. Por Río Piedras, los encuentran mucho en los pubs. Llego a la universidad y tú lo ves, no estás en Puerto Rico porque están aquí. Por algo están aquí porque no quieren estar en su país, pero están aquí, están criticando al gobierno, a la realidad de vida. Entonces están aquí porque son todos aceptados.*

[**Odalys:** I think that Puerto Ricans accept Dominicans because many of them are working here. But Dominicans, despite the fact that they are here and they live off of what they earn here, don't accept the Puerto Ricans. That is what I think.]

**Petra:** Why do you think that?

**Odalys:** Yes, because, from living here. In Río Piedras, you find them a lot in the pubs [small bars along the side of the road]. I arrive at the university, and you see, you are not in Puerto Rico because they are here. They are here for something because they don't want to be in their country, but they are here, they are criticizing the government, the way of life. So they are here because they are all accepted.]

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<sup>15</sup> Dominicans in Puerto Rico also encounter intense xenophobia in Puerto Rico. They are often considered to be involved in the illegal economy, and portrayed as outsiders who come to Puerto Rico to steal Puerto Ricans' jobs and take advantage of social services there (Iturrondo 2000; Martínez-San Miguel 1998). Dominicans are also stereotyped in the media and in popular jokes as lazy, stupid and criminal (Martínez-San Miguel 1998). Indeed, in many of my interviews with Puerto Rican youth, many interviewees, regardless of their own racial or socioeconomic class identity, expressed similar stereotypical and xenophobic views towards Dominicans. Furthermore, in addition to Omar, other Dominicans who I befriended in San Juan often described incidents where they experienced racism and xenophobia, especially at school and when seeking employment.

Odalys describes Río Piedras transforming from a Puerto Rican place to a foreign Dominican place. Considering Omar and Odalys's comments together makes evident the identification of Río Piedras as a place marked by a "foreign blackness" that is fundamentally not Puerto Rican.

Similar to Dominicans, Nuyoricans' experiences in the United States also attribute them with another kind of "foreign blackness." The term "Nuyorican" technically refers to Puerto Ricans who live in New York City; however, colloquially the term often refers to Puerto Ricans who live in the United States. Like other Latin American and Caribbean people, Puerto Ricans have a long history of migration to the United States dating back to the nineteenth century. However, with the granting of U.S. citizenship in 1917 and the establishment of labor incentives to encourage migration in the mid-twentieth century, the Puerto Rican community in the United States grew dramatically, especially in the 1950s (Whalen 2005). The ability to travel between the U.S. and Puerto Rico relatively easily has led to patterns of "circular migration" in which some Puerto Ricans move back and forth (Duany 2002; J. Flores 2009). As a result of such frequent migration, approximately three million Puerto Ricans live in the United States, and three million Puerto Ricans live on the island, according to the 2000 U.S. Census.

While Puerto Ricans settled all over the United States, the majority of them remained in New York City, concentrating in neighborhoods such as the South Bronx and Spanish Harlem. Puerto Ricans' racially mixed appearance did not fit in easily with the binary black/white divide of U.S. racial classifications. Consequently, "Puerto Rican" became its own racialized identity considered similar to African Americans due to their comparable migration and settlement patterns to the urban centers of the United States after World War II (Grosfoguel and Georas 1996; R. Rivera 2003; Rodríguez-Morazzani 1996). As a result, Juan Flores (2000) notes that "In terms of long-standing association of a social and cultural nature, as well as common socioeconomic indicators, [Puerto Ricans] have shared as much with African Americans as with any Latino counterpart" (10). In this context, Puerto Ricans in the United States have routinely been racialized as "not quite black."<sup>16</sup>

This racialization of Nuyoricans marks them as not "authentic" Puerto Ricans. Nuyoricans who move back and forth between Puerto Rico and the United States have ties to various sites throughout the island (e.g. see J. Flores 2009). In other words, Nuyoricans do not necessarily settle in specific neighborhoods, as Dominicans do, but rather return to cities or towns where they grew up, have family or another personal connection. Consequently, the emplacement of blackness in Nuyorican communities does not necessarily identify a particular geographical location within the island itself, but rather, following the racialization of Nuyoricans by the U.S., emplaces blackness within Nuyorican communities in the United States. As Miriam Jiménez Román (2008) has recently argued, Nuyoricans' choice to acknowledge "the reality of anti-black racism" over "the myth of race-free color blindness" racializes them in turn, making it impossible for Nuyoricans to make claims on Puerto Ricanness as defined by hegemonic discourses of racial democracy. Likewise, in his recent work about circular migration in the Spanish Caribbean, Juan Flores (2009) argues that experiences of anti-black

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<sup>16</sup> The connections between Nuyoricans and African Americans are especially important to the history of reggaetón because Nuyoricans participated in the founding of hip hop, one of the premiere diasporic resources that influenced the development of reggaetón. I will describe the importance of Nuyoricans to reggaetón in more detail in the next chapter.

racism and contact with other African diasporic populations in the United States causes some return migrants to Puerto Rico to refute the Eurocentric bias of Puerto Rican racial democracy discourses, claiming a black identity instead.

One of the markers of the “blackening” of Nuyoricans is their participation in cultural practices associated with black communities in the United States. Verónica describes the changes she saw in her older brother when he moved from Utuado, a town in the central mountains of Puerto Rico, to New York:

*Se va para Estados Unidos, a vivir en Nueva York. Cambió su manera de hablar, su manera de vestir. O sea, él siempre vestía con su pantalón super anchos... pero más cuando fue allá, con su mega tenis, con los pantalones super grandes, que caben cuatro de él en dentro de su pantalón. Con una camisilla, para que se vean los tatuajes que se hizo, porque está todo tatuado. Y yo lo veo como que “Quién tú eres” y él como que “Um, um, you know, um, um, mami.” Y yo: “Yo no puedo creer que seas mi hermano.” Se cambió totalmente.*

[He went to the United States, to live in New York. He changed the way he spoke, the way he dressed. Or like, he always wore super wide pants...but more when he went there, with his mega tennis shoes, with his super large pants that fit four of him inside of them. With a tank top so you could see the tatoos, because he has tatoos everywhere. And I look at him like “Who are you,” and he is like “Um, um, you know, um um mami.” And I’m like, “I can’t believe this is my brother.” He completely changed.]

Although Verónica does not describe her brother as black, her comments reveal how his transformation occurred because he adopted a style associated with signifiers of blackness, namely hip hop and reggaetón. Such involvement in certain styles and cultural practices associated with African Americans in the United States serves as evidence of the “African Americanization” of Nuyoricans in the eyes of many island Puerto Ricans.

Nuyoricans’ adoption of other characteristics considered “American,” such as speaking English and having limited proficiency in Spanish, also contributes to the perception of them as “inauthentic” Puerto Ricans. Mari moved to Puerto Rico in her early twenties after living in the United States, and faced questions about her Puerto Ricanness from her island peers:

**Mari:** *In the beginning, mi español estaba medio raro, “ah tú eres nuyorican. ¿Y cuánto tiempo tú llevas aquí?” Este es la pregunta que me dicen más que nunca, porque mi acento es de allá. No se me va a ir hoy ni mañana y llevaba dentro de un año ya... If you’re not from Puerto Rico, ah! You’re not Puerto Rican, you’re Nuyorican, “ah pero ¿de dónde eran sus papas?” “Son de Nueva York.” “Ah, pero tú no eres puertorriqueña, tú eres nuyorican.” Es una raza aparte.*

[In the beginning, my Spanish was a little strange, “Ah, you are Nuyorican. And how long have you been here?” That is the question that they asked me more than anything, because my accent was from there. I am not going to leave today or tomorrow, and I was already here over a year...If you’re not from Puerto Rico, ah! You’re not Puerto Rican, you’re Nuyorican, “Ah but, where are your parents from?” “They are from New York.” “Ah, but you aren’t Puerto Rican, you are Nuyorican.” Its a separate race.]

Mari's description of Nuyoricans as a "separate race," identified primarily by her poor Spanish upon her arrival to Puerto Rico, reinforces the distinction between Nuyoricans and Puerto Ricans. Although this differentiation may be interpreted as an effort to maintain a unique Puerto Rican culture in the face of the island's colonial relationship to the United States, racial divisions compound this assumption. In other words, part of Nuyoricans' position as "inauthentic" Puerto Ricans stems from their association with African American communities in the United States.

Ultimately, the emplacements of blackness outside of Puerto Rico reinforce the construction of a whitened Puerto Rican national identity. On the one hand, emplacement of blackness in Dominican communities represents a counterpoint between the black Dominican immigrant and the mixed-but-white Puerto Rican citizen. At the same time, the associations of Nuyoricans with blackness underscores the idea that authentic Puerto Ricans must be white and exhibit Hispanic values. Although mapping out Puerto Rico's cultural topography focuses on places within the island, these emplacements of blackness outside of it must also be taken into account, as they exist alongside emplacements of blackness within Puerto Rico to strengthen the Eurocentric ideals of discourses of racial democracy.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described how place and race become mutually constituted through the different intersections of social relations and hierarchies of power within Puerto Rico's cultural topography. As social constructions, the meanings of place and race are always in flux, depending on the particular social, political, and economic conditions that occur at specific moments in time. Consequently, blackness has been emplaced in multiple locations within Puerto Rico's cultural topography. These emplacements produce divergent meanings of blackness that often contradict each other. Different archetypal figures such as the *loiceño*, the *cafre*, and the Dominican produced by the particular discourses surrounding their places of origin (i.e. Loíza, *caseríos*, Dominican Republic) embody these emplacements of blackness.

The multiple emplacements of blackness in Puerto Rico operate vis-à-vis racial democracy in different ways. The emplacements of blackness outside of the United States, such as within Dominican and Nuyorican communities, provide counterpoints to the whitened image of Puerto Rican national identity, historically embodied by the *jíbaro* figure. On the island, the emplacement of blackness within Loíza has taken the place of other coastal regions to represent the quintessential African "third root" within dominant constructions of racial democracy. In this context, emplacement of blackness in Loíza gives the semblance of full inclusion into the nation while still maintaining modern racialized hierarchies that position Loíza as "antiquated" and folkloric in relation to the mixed-but-white Puerto Rican nation. In addition, the emplacement of blackness within *caseríos* occurred via the articulation of certain social and political projects meant to integrate working class, predominantly black and brown Puerto Ricans into the nation. However, as *caserío* residents began establishing permanent communities there, the discourse surrounding *caseríos* changed, and abject blackness, constituted by a myriad of stereotypical tropes of blackness, became associated with *caseríos*. Like Nuyoricans, these *caserío* residents could not be considered "authentic" Puerto Ricans because they did not ascribe to the modern values of the state, representing a constitutive outside within the Puerto Rico's cultural topography.

The emplacement of blackness within *caseríos* is especially important for the development of reggaetón. Reggaetón and its predecessor underground emerged primarily out of the *caseríos* as vehicles through which youth could redefine blackness, and in the process negotiate their own identities and positions within Puerto Rico. As reggaetón grew more popular, artists traversed the different black places within Puerto Rico's cultural topography, incorporating diasporic resources from not only other emplacements of blackness in Puerto Rico (e.g. bomba from Loíza or merengue from Dominican communities), but also from other sites in the African diaspora. As I will demonstrate in the next chapter, the new definitions of blackness expressed by reggaetón artists and fans provided a serious critique of the hegemonic constructions of racial democracy in Puerto Rico.

## Chapter Four: “Yo Sólo Canto Rap”: Diaspora, Cultural Nationalism, and Early Reggaetón<sup>1</sup>

In the 1980s, Luis Armando Lozada Cruz, more popularly known as Vico C, began listening to hip hop. Born in Brooklyn, New York, Vico relocated to the Puerto de Tierra *caserío* in San Juan with his family as a young child. Vico C had enrolled in acting classes, and after honing his public speaking skills, began to experiment with rap. Vico related to the stories about “ghetto life” in songs by African American hip hop groups such as Run DMC, Sugar Hill Gang, LL Cool J, Slick Rick, and KRS One. Around 1985, Vico C won fifteen dollars in a hip hop contest where he met DJ Negro, a young DJ who had been mixing hip hop records (R. Rivera 1992/1993). The two began to record mixtapes on cassettes. DJ Negro would borrow beats from popular U.S. hip hop songs and Vico C would rap original lyrics over them. They would make about twenty or thirty copies of each tape and sell them in the *caseríos* between San Juan and Carolina, and after several years established a name for themselves in urban Puerto Rico.

At the time, many Puerto Ricans were listening to salsa, merengue, and rock from the United States. Jorge Oquendo, a music producer who grew up in the United States, connected with a group of promoters who wanted to bring artists from the U.S. to perform in Puerto Rico. Oquendo realized that for the price of one rock group such as Poison, one could pay for two or three rap groups to appear in Puerto Rico (Savidge and Chankin 2008). The Prime Entertainment Group started bringing artists such as LL Cool J, Big Daddy Kane, and Public Enemy to perform on the island. In 1987, DJ Negro approached Oquendo requesting to open for Public Enemy (Savidge and Chankin 2008). According to Vico C, the performance was his big break, exposing him to industry executives who released his first professional recording, *La Recta Final*, in 1989.

“La Recta Final” [The Final Stretch] was a Spanish-language rap song that discussed problems such as drug abuse, AIDS, and violence in *caseríos* like Puerto de Tierra where Vico grew up. Often recognized as one of the first major Spanish rap hits, “La Recta Final” established Vico C as a pioneer in the development of underground, the precursor to contemporary reggaetón.<sup>2</sup> Musically, underground shares similar vocal styles and the consistent “boom-ch-boom-chick” rhythm with contemporary reggaetón (Marshall 2009:46, 49). However, underground did not include the high tech musical production of contemporary reggaetón; rather, underground contains more “unembellished” combinations of hip hop and dancehall beats (Marshall 2009). DJs pieced together samples from the popular Jamaican dancehall and U.S. American hip hop beats of the time as rappers performed lyrics that spoke to the specific issues facing *caseríos* and urban neighborhoods. Underground also differed from contemporary reggaetón in its relationship to the market. Indeed, the music was named underground because

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<sup>1</sup> “Yo solo canto rap” is a lyric from Eddie Dee’s “Señor Oficial,” and translates to “I just sing rap.”

<sup>2</sup> Wayne Marshall (2009) notes that underground was one of several terms used to refer to the rap-reggae musical hybrid during the 1990s; he lists “*melaza*” (literally translated as “molasses”, signifying the black racial connotations of the music), “rap”, “reggae”, and “*dembow*” (referring to the dancehall song “Dem Bow” by Shabba Ranks that provides the basis for reggaetón’s beat) as other labels for underground (Marshall 2009:27). Following the pioneering scholarship by Raquel Z. Rivera (1997a, 1997b, 1998, 2009) and Mayra Santos Febres (1996a, 1996b), I refer to the 1990s precursor to reggaetón as “underground”, and to the artists who created it as “rappers.”

of the initial distribution of mixtapes in the informal economy (Giovanetti 2003; Marshall 2009; Santos Febres 1996b).<sup>3</sup>

It is difficult to pinpoint the precise date when underground shifted to reggaetón. Wayne Marshall (2009) argues that as underground became more commercialized in the late 1990s, the music became increasingly “synthesized” with fewer direct dancehall and hip hop samples (49). Beginning in late 1990s, DJs began composing more original beats rather than relying on direct samples from previously recorded hip hop and dancehall. At the same time, lyrical themes centered more explicitly on sex and parties (Marshall 2009:50-53). New recordings by DJ Nelson (who is often credited with coining the term “reggaetón”) and DJ Blass also popularized the term “reggaetón” (Marshall 2009:51). Still, some artists and fans continue to refer to reggaetón as “reggae,” and many of the artists as either “*reggaetoneros*” or “*raperos*.” Underground therefore refers to the rap-dancehall fusions that developed and circulated within Puerto Rico’s working class urban *barrios* and *caseríos* from the 1980s until the 1990s without the backing of large record companies.

Several scholars have written about the history of underground in Puerto Rico. These articles have portrayed underground as an expression of working class, predominantly black male youth from *caseríos* (e.g. Giovanetti 2003; R. Rivera 1997a; R. Rivera 1997b; R. Rivera 1998; Santos Febres 1996a; Santos Febres 1996b). In addition, Raquel Z. Rivera (1997a, 1997b, 1998, 2009) has shown how broader policy initiatives, specifically the *Mano Dura contra el Crimen* [Hard Hand against Crime] Campaign (hereafter called “*Mano Dura*”), impacted the development of underground. Although these articles provide a critical background for understanding underground’s development, in this chapter I focus on both underground’s local positioning vis-à-vis blackness, *caseríos*, and state policy initiatives and the possibilities underground offers for Puerto Rican youth to engage in a diasporic space. That is, through the incorporation of diasporic resources in underground music and style, Puerto Rican underground artists and fans participated in a diasporic space that claimed full citizenship for black Puerto Ricans.

Although diasporic space includes the recognition of transnational linkages across different sites of the African diaspora, it is also supremely localized. As Jacqueline Nassy Brown (1998) suggests, local conditions motivate individuals to utilize diasporic resources in negotiating new definitions of blackness that speak to their particular circumstances. In Puerto Rico, engagement in diasporic space via cultural practices such as underground serves as a response to local systems of racialized exclusion. Many underground artists self-identified with local urban neighborhoods, what Mayra Santos Febres (1996a) terms “*territorios raperos*” [rap territories] (see also Dinzey Flores 2008a; Giovanetti 2003; R. Rivera 1997a; R. Rivera 1997b; R. Rivera 1998; R. Rivera 2009; Santos Febres 1996b). *Caseríos* held a central location in these *territorios raperos* because many underground artists and DJs were *caserío* residents. Many of the original underground recording studios were actually established in the living rooms and bedrooms of DJs living in the *caseríos*, and many of the first large underground concerts took

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<sup>3</sup> Raquel Z. Rivera (2009) argues that, as with hip hop in the United States, the term “underground” also differentiates music considered more “street-oriented, vernacular, spontaneous, and uncensored...as opposed to the studio-oriented, glossy, sanitized aesthetic of the mainstream market” in contemporary Puerto Rico (113). For the purposes of this chapter, however, I refer to underground as the specific music that predates reggaetón.



place in the courtyards and parking lots of these public housing developments (Savage and Chankin 2008). Underground lyrics addressed the social issues impacting *caseríos*, particularly the high incidents of violence in these areas.

Indeed, the increase of violence in *caseríos* played a critical role in dominant portrayals of these areas as emplacements of “abject” blackness. As I argued in Chapter Three, various emplacements of blackness circulate together in Puerto Rico and, in turn, reinforce the hegemonic discourse of racial democracy. As opposed to the folkloric blackness emplaced in Loíza, the abject blackness emplaced within *caseríos* reiterates many stereotypical tropes of blackness such as hypersexuality, poor work ethic, and proclivities towards violence. Since the *caseríos*’ inception as solutions to the burgeoning growth of shantytowns in the mid-twentieth century, their residents have been attributed with these tropes of abject blackness (see Chapter Three). Shantytown residents at the time were overwhelmingly black and brown and working class. As evidenced by ethnographies such as Oscar Lewis’s classic *La Vida* (1966), stereotypical tropes of blackness were attributed to the shantytown residents and subsequently followed residents into the newly constructed *caseríos*. These stereotypes persisted over time as *caserío* residents remained in the housing projects over several generations. In the 1990s, Puerto Rico, and San Juan more specifically, experienced unprecedented levels of violence which the media portrayed as perpetrated primarily by young black male residents of *caseríos* and working class *barrios*. These representations reinforced the understanding of blackness as abject that had already been emplaced within *caseríos* during the same time period that underground developed.

Rather than the folkloric blackness of Loíza, the emplacement of abject blackness in *caseríos* supports dominant constructions of racial democracy by positioning this blackness as outside of the boundaries of a “moral” and “respectable” Puerto Ricanness. In other words, within Puerto Rico’s cultural topography, the *caseríos* represented a particular understanding of blackness that was portrayed as fundamentally distinct from the values associated with the hegemonic discourse of racial democracy. As Percy Hintzen, Jean Rahier and Felipe Smith (2010) point out, blackness is relegated to the “constitutive outside” within states, and therefore subject to “state regulation, control, and jurisdiction” (14). As public housing projects, *caseríos* had always been regulated by government organizations from both the U.S. and Puerto Rico (e.g. see Dinzey Flores 2005; Tyrell 2008). However, the *Mano Dura contra el Crimen* campaign in the mid-1990s involved literal policing of *caseríos* as Puerto Rican police and the U.S. National Guard raided the housing projects to arrest alleged drug dealers. *Mano Dura* also included the construction of gates and guard towers around *caseríos* in an attempt to “contain” criminal activity. The dramatic raids and military-style occupations of housing projects reinforced the popular perceptions of *caseríos* as sites of abjection divorced from Puerto Rican national space and physically contained by the gates which segregated *caseríos* from the rest of the city. Therefore, *Mano Dura* served as more than a mere backdrop for the emergence of underground; rather, it was a formative event that fortified the image of *caseríos* as emplacements of blackness as abject against which underground artists expressed new understandings of blackness.

In order to create this localized response, Puerto Rican youth drew from diasporic resources, especially from U.S. hip hop and Jamaican dancehall. Circular migration between Puerto Rico and the United States caused many Puerto Ricans to encounter new forms of racialization which subsequently led to the recognition of alternative conceptions of blackness (e.g. see J. Flores 2009). Puerto Rican migrants’ interactions with African American and West

Indian communities in New York resulted in Nuyoricans' participation in the development of hip hop (e.g. see J. Flores 2000; R. Rivera 2003). Puerto Ricans on the island had access to the latest hip hop music and styles through interaction with Nuyoricans, as well as hip hop concerts and radio play in Puerto Rico. Likewise, as Jamaican dancehall made inroads in Caribbean communities in New York, Nuyoricans brought it back to Puerto Rico as well (Marshall 2009:25-26). On the island, Panamanian *reggae en español* recordings that combined Jamaican dancehall riddims with Spanish-language lyrics also became popular in San Juan's nightclubs (Marshall 2009). The global circulation of these musical practices combined with the various migratory circuits between New York and the Caribbean were essential to creating the conditions of possibility for underground to develop.

Participation in this African diasporic space resulted in more than the mere integration of various musical practices into underground. It also exposed Puerto Rican youth to new ways of imagining blackness. Because of their inclusion of various diasporic resources in underground, Puerto Rican youth could recognize similarities between the conditions of racialized exclusion impacting their communities with those of other sites in the African diaspora. The recognition of comparable experiences created the possibility for Puerto Rican youth to create new ideas about blackness that centered on diasporic connections. This diasporic blackness refuted dominant constructions of blackness as either folkloric or abject. Instead, underground artists claimed full citizenship for *caserío* residents through the production of new links between blackness and Puerto Ricanness. These claims to citizenship posed a serious threat to the hegemonic discourses of racial democracy in Puerto Rico that distinguished blackness from Puerto Rican identity. Consequently, critics of underground published editorials in local newspapers claiming that underground symbolized the latest form of "cultural imperialism" from the United States and therefore could not be considered a Puerto Rican phenomenon. As underground grew more popular, state authorities also mobilized against the music, culminating in the confiscation of underground recordings that had begun to be sold in Puerto Rican record stores. These attempts to curb the growth of underground can be read as moves to secure the continued hegemony of discourses of racial democracy.

This chapter considers the development of underground that emerged via Puerto Rican participation in African diasporic space. In order to understand the specific local systems of racial exclusion that underground contested, I begin with a more detailed discussion of *Mano Dura's* role in cementing the reputation of *caseríos* as sites of abject blackness. Next, I examine the processes of cultural exchange and transnational migration that brought underground artists into contact with the array of diasporic resources which they incorporated into their music. Relying on underground lyrics, music videos, and my interview with Vico C, I examine the particular constructions of blackness and Puerto Ricanness that underground artists express in their music. The final section of this chapter examines the debates surrounding underground in the mid-1990s to demonstrate how underground's orientation towards a diasporic blackness threatened the hegemony of discourses of racial democracy. Ultimately, this chapter uses underground as a lens through which to explore Puerto Rican youth's participation in diasporic space and the subsequent debates regarding the position of blackness within Puerto Rican identity that ensued.

## ***Mano Dura Contra el Crimen and the Emplacement of Object Blackness in Caseríos***

In 1993, the Puerto Rican government initiated Operation Centurion, popularly referred to as *Mano Dura Contra el Crimen*, which targeted *caseríos* in an attempt to reduce crime in Puerto Rico. The first raid occurred in the Villa España housing projects in San Juan on June 4, 1993. National Guard soldiers and Puerto Rican police officers stormed the *caserío* a few hours after midnight, arriving in helicopters and military vehicles to search for drugs, weapons, and other contraband in apartments that supposedly had been staked out earlier by undercover police (Simon 1997b). The raid on Villa España was the first of seventy-four raids by the National Guard and Puerto Rican police department over the course of three years (Simon 1997b). Once the actual raids ended, police continued to occupy the *caseríos* until 1999 (Rivera-Bonilla 2003:259). Initially, the National Guard's presence was meant to prevent brutality against *caserío* residents by Puerto Rican police; however, the raids, which sometimes included as many as four hundred police officers and soldiers within one *caserío*, resulted in a dramatic display where "apartments were searched, doors knocked down, and residents searched and sometimes beaten" (Rivera-Bonilla 2003:252; Simon 1997a). In the end, half of the *caseríos* targeted by *Mano Dura* were located in the San Juan metropolitan area, with the majority in the city of San Juan proper (Rivera-Bonilla 2003:259).

The dramatic intervention and occupation of *caseríos* during the 1990s comprised a government response to the increase of violent crime in Puerto Rico over several decades. In the 1970s, drug-related crimes increased substantially from earlier decades (Rodríguez Beruff 1999:54). During this time, the number of drug addicts within the island created a sizable market for drugs in Puerto Rico (Rodríguez Beruff 1999:54). Besides the growing numbers of addicts in Puerto Rico, both the Puerto Rican and U.S. governments maintained that Puerto Rico increasingly served as an entry point for drugs from South America and the rest of the Caribbean arriving in the United States (Montalvo-Barbot 1997:535; Rodríguez Beruff 1999:78-79). Crime rates in Puerto Rico continued to rise after the 1970s (Rodríguez Beruff 1999:55). Between 1980 and 1990, the homicide rate in Puerto Rico increased by 129% (Montalvo-Barbot 1997:536). By 1994, San Juan held the dubious distinction of being one of the cities with the highest homicide rate in the United States (Montalvo-Barbot 1997; Rivera-Bonilla 1999).

Kelvin Santiago-Valles (1996) notes that this increase in crime in Puerto Rico must also be considered in relation to unemployment in the island's urban centers. Santiago-Valles (1996) argues that, throughout the twentieth century, Puerto Rico developed a racialized division of labor with descendants of wealthy Europeans and "light *mulatos*" constituting the upper classes, and black and "dark *mulatos*" comprising the lower classes. Rapid industrialization of the island led to massive migration to urban areas in the mid-twentieth century; however, by the 1970s, factory jobs declined, and unemployment, especially among young men of color, continued to rise (Santiago-Valles 1996:45, 47). The high unemployment rate combined with a political system that benefited the upper classes created feelings of disenfranchisement among the urban, predominantly black poor (Santiago-Valles 1996). On the other hand, from the 1970s through the 1990s, the informal economy steadily increased, with values between 3.5 and 4 million dollars in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Santiago-Valles 1995:33; Santiago-Valles 1996:49). In addition to drug trafficking, other common criminal activities included robberies and car jackings (Rivera-Bonilla 2003:99). The informal economy thus employed a large percentage of

urban Puerto Ricans, including the young non-white men of the working classes (Santiago-Valles 1995; Santiago-Valles 1996).

Media coverage of the burgeoning criminal activity during the 1970s, 1980s, and especially 1990s, reinforced stereotypical tropes affiliated with abject blackness and *caseríos*. Indeed, the media frequently portrayed San Juan's *caseríos* as the epicenters of criminal activity on the island (Dinzey Flores 2005; Rivera-Bonilla 2003; Santiago-Valles 1995). During her fieldwork in Cupey during the late 1990s, Ivelisse Rivera-Bonilla (2003) noted that sensationalist headlines in newspapers and pictures of bloodshed and homicide crime scenes cultivated a culture of fear among the middle class Puerto Ricans in the *urbanización* in which she lived. Jorge Rodríguez Beruff (1999) describes the news coverage of crime in the 1980s and 1990s as “*un interminable desfile de cadáveres y violencia, mayormente de hombres jóvenes de residenciales y barriadas*” [an endless parade of cadavers and violence, mainly by young men from the housing projects and poor urban neighborhoods] (56). Such images and narratives portrayed *caseríos* as centers of crime allegedly perpetrated by young black men. These narratives subsequently served as “justification” for police to focus many of their investigations and activities within housing projects and poor urban neighborhoods (Santiago-Valles 1995). Ultimately, these images helped emplace blackness as abject within the *caseríos*, creating explicit connections between blackness, working class communities, and criminal activity in the popular imagination.

*Mano Dura* served as the culmination of the process of racializing crime and criminalizing *caseríos* during the 1990s. During his election campaign, Governor Pedro Rosselló had promised to eradicate crime on the island. In 1993, he selected Pedro Toledo, a former FBI agent, to head the Puerto Rican police department and implement *Mano Dura* (Simon 1997a). Toledo suggested the involvement of the National Guard as a tremendous show of force that would assert the authority of the police, who had been viewed until that time as relatively powerless and defunct (Simon 1997a). *Mano Dura* consisted of three phases: rescue, restore, and re-empower. The “rescue” phase included the actual raids of housing projects. During the raids, the National Guard was deployed to guard the periphery of the *caserío* while police entered apartments and arrested individuals identified in prior investigations as suspects of drug-related crimes (Simon 1997a; Simon 1997b). Once the raid was complete, the government constructed gates and guard towers around *caseríos*, and established police stations within them (Dinzey Flores 2005; Dinzey Flores 2008a; Rivera-Bonilla 2003; Simon 1997b). After the raids, the “restore” phase took place, with city officials repairing structural damage that had been neglected until that time (Simon 1997b). Finally, the “re-empower” phase entailed the implementation of various social service programs for residents of *caseríos* by a “Quality of Life Congress” that included fifteen government agencies such as the Office of Youth Affairs and the Aqueduct and Sewer Administration (Simon 1997b). In the end, police remained stationed within *caseríos* to continue anti-crime efforts.

Despite the dramatic show of force during the raids, the success of *Mano Dura* in curbing criminal activity was questionable. Puerto Rican media outlets reported that the raids had decreased crime, and police presence led to more criminal arrests and the overall protection of *caserío* residents (Rivera-Bonilla 2003; Rodríguez Beruff 1999; Simon 1997b). Headlines about the “occupation” and “conquering” of *caseríos*, often described as “warzones,” emphasized that the raids successfully restored order and protected the public (Rivera-Bonilla 2003:252).

However, while some crimes reduced after the implementation of *Mano Dura*, the homicide rate remained unchanged, and in some cases even slightly increased (Montalvo-Barbot 1997; Simon 1997b). Police confiscated fewer drug paraphernalia and weapons than expected during the initial raids, and even less with each subsequent raid (Montalvo-Barbot 1997). Furthermore, *caserío* residents complained that police stationed in the *caseríos* often targeted innocent people during inspections while known drug dealers openly sold their products in public places nearby (Montalvo-Barbot 1997; Rivera-Bonilla 2003; Simon 1997b). In general, many *caserío* residents felt that *Mano Dura* had not effectively decreased crime in their communities, but instead served as a political “spectacle” to assert state power and control (Dinzey Flores 2005; Rivera-Bonilla 2003).

Although *Mano Dura*'s effects on crime rates may be debatable, the campaign succeeded in reinforcing the boundaries of emplaced blackness in *caseríos*. Not only did the images and headlines in Puerto Rican media outlets strengthen stereotypes of working class, non-white *caserío* residents, but also the gates constructed around *caseríos* during *Mano Dura* visually marked *caseríos* as places of difference. Gates formed part of the urban landscape in Puerto Rico since the 1980s, when the *Ley de Cierre* allowed neighborhoods to build gates in order to restrict access to certain areas; however, these gates enclosed middle and upper middle class communities (*urbanizaciones*), serving as markers of upper class identities (Dinzey Flores 2008a; Rivera-Bonilla 2003). On the other hand, the gates surrounding *caseríos* were involuntary and constructed to control and restrict movement of *caserío* residents (Dinzey Flores 2008a). As Zaire Dinzey Flores (2005) argues, the gates surrounding housing projects ultimately contribute to racial and class segregation in Puerto Rico's urban areas by underscoring the perceived class and racial distinctions between *caseríos* and middle and upper class areas in Puerto Rico (see also Dinzey Flores 2008a). *Mano Dura* strengthened the popular perception of *caseríos* as sites of “violence, chaos, insecurity, poverty, lack of education, lack of control, multiple-family dwellings, gates and blackness” (Dinzey Flores 2008a:216).<sup>4</sup> Tropes of blackness associated with violence and criminality became attributed to *caseríos* and visually signified by media representations, the on-going presence of tanks and guards within housing projects, and the construction of imposing gates and guard towers. As opposed to the blackness from Loíza, the blackness emplaced in *caseríos* was represented as fundamentally distinct from the rest of Puerto Rican society. *Mano Dura* therefore fortified the emplacement of abject blackness in *caseríos* against which underground artists articulated new entanglements of race, place, and national identity.

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<sup>4</sup> Individuals in the building where I lived during fieldwork expressed similar views of *caseríos* as the ones that Zaire Dinzey Flores (2008a) describes. My apartment was located near the intersection of Isla Verde Avenue and Jupiter Street, at the end of the Isla Verde neighborhood of Carolina. Isla Verde is home to some of the island's most expensive hotels and private condominiums. My apartment building was smaller than most of the ones on the block, and located only a few blocks from the entrance to the Lloréns Torres housing projects, one of the biggest *caseríos* in the San Juan metropolitan area. Our building employed a nightly security guard and was surrounded by remote-operated gates. I traveled daily to the university and other points in my fieldwork on the A-5 bus, which stopped along Isla Verde Avenue before entering Lloréns Torres on the way to Old San Juan. Many of my neighbors advised me to rent a car instead, warning that the bus was not only unreliable, but might leave me stranded in Lloréns Torres. Crime continues to be an issue in Puerto Rico, especially around San Juan. My neighbors' comments reflect not only concern about the prevalence of crime, but also the persistence of stereotypes of *caseríos* as epicenters of criminal activity.

## Hip Hop, Migration, and New Diasporic Affiliations

Although underground responded to the conditions within the *caseríos*, it did so through the incorporation of diasporic resources, particularly hip hop from the United States. According to Marc D. Perry (2008), hip hop is a fundamentally diasporic practice through which globalized signifiers of blackness are adapted for local processes of “identification and self-making” (639). Perry (2008) argues that black-identified youth from throughout the African diaspora draw on hip hop to “mobilize notions of black-self in ways that are at one time both contestive and transcendent of nationally bound, hegemonically prescriptive racial framings” (636). Hip hop thus provides a space where “diasporic belonging” emerges as a constitutive element of these black identities (Perry 2008). Underground’s influences from hip hop are audible in the samples of popular 1980s and 1990s rap hits that underground DJs fused into their beats. However, the impact of hip hop on underground includes the new ideas about blackness that emerged out of Nuyoricans’, or Puerto Ricans living in New York City, encounters with new forms of racialization in the United States. Indeed, U.S. hip hop developed in part as a response to the recognition of similar experiences of racial and class discrimination among Nuyoricans, West Indian immigrants, and African Americans living in New York City.

Puerto Ricans have migrated to the United States since the nineteenth century; however, the granting of U.S. citizenship to Puerto Ricans in 1917 and the subsequent growth of labor recruitment programs on the island (particularly in the 1940s and 1950s) spawned a dramatic increase in the number of Puerto Ricans living in the United States.<sup>5</sup> In fact, between 1910 and 1950, the number of Puerto Ricans in the United States increased from 1,513 to 301,375 (Whalen 2005:11). Although Puerto Ricans settled throughout the U.S., New York City received the majority of migrants. In fact, the Puerto Rican population in New York City soared from about 245,000 in 1950 to over 700,000 in 1970 (Whalen 2005:32).

Within New York City, Puerto Ricans settled in neighborhoods such as the Lower East Side and East Harlem in Manhattan, and Bushwick and Williamsburg in Brooklyn (R. Rivera 2003:23). By the 1960s, however, most Puerto Ricans lived in the Bronx (R. Rivera 2003). Nuyoricans worked primarily in manufacturing; consequently, they were greatly impacted by the deindustrialization of New York City during the 1960s and 1970s (R. Rivera 2003:24). For example, from the 1960s through the 1980s, Puerto Ricans had the highest poverty rates of any ethnic group in New York City (R. Rivera 2003:24). Moreover, beginning in the 1970s, Puerto Ricans began leaving New York to settle in other parts of the United States or return to Puerto Rico (R. Rivera 2003:24; Whalen 2005:37). Although New York declined as the primary

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<sup>5</sup> In the nineteenth century, Puerto Ricans lived in cities such as New Orleans, New York, Tampa, and Philadelphia (Whalen 2005:4). After 1898, Puerto Ricans continued coming to the United States to work primarily in factories and in agriculture (Whalen 2005). The first group of Puerto Ricans to migrate to the U.S. after 1898 settled in Hawai’i (which at that time was not a state, but rather a territory of the U.S.), and other communities were established in California, Missouri, and New York, among other states (Whalen 2005). The U.S. Congress granted Puerto Ricans U.S. citizenship with the passing of the Jones Act in 1917. The Puerto Rican population increased from 1,513 to 11,811 between 1910 and 1920, and the vast majority of migrants lived in New York City (Whalen 2005:24). Concerned with rising unemployment and overpopulation during the 1940s and 1950s, the Puerto Rican government encouraged further migration to the United States, establishing contracts with various U.S. companies to recruit Puerto Rican labor for agriculture and manufacturing (Whalen 2005).

destination for Puerto Rican migrants, a substantial community of Puerto Ricans continues to exist in the city, and, until recently, constituted the largest Latino population there (J. Flores 2000).

As described in Chapter Three, Nuyorican communities represent one form of emplaced blackness within Puerto Rico's cultural topography because their experiences in the United States are assumed to have "African Americanized" them (e.g. see Jiménez Román 2008). Indeed, several scholars have discussed the similarities between Nuyoricans and African Americans in the United States and, more specifically, New York (e.g. see J. Flores 2000; Grosfoguel and Georas 2000; R. Rivera 2003; Rodríguez-Morazzani 1996). Because most Puerto Ricans are racially mixed, they did not fit easily within the "black/white" binary of U.S. race relations. As a result, "Puerto Rican" became a distinct racial category in New York (R. Rivera 2003:26). Puerto Ricans were portrayed as racialized others who were subordinate to whites and distinct from, but akin to African Americans (Grosfoguel and Georas 2000; R. Rivera 2003; Rodríguez-Morazzani 1996).

Ramón Grosfoguel and Chloé Georas (1996, 2000) argue that the comparable racialization of African Americans and Puerto Ricans results from their similar positions as "colonial/racial subjects" in the United States. They insist that the racialization of African Americans and Puerto Ricans must be understood not only in relation to color hierarchies, but also their positions within the "coloniality of power" that cements white privilege within the structure of the U.S. (Grosfoguel and Georas 2000). Likewise, Juan Flores (2000) argues that the colonial relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States results in Puerto Ricans sharing as much, if not more, with African Americans than other Latino groups (see also R. Rivera 2003:27-29). In New York, African Americans and Puerto Ricans lived in the same neighborhoods and suffered from unemployment, poverty, discrimination, police brutality and "racial devaluation" (Grosfoguel and Georas 1996; Grosfoguel and Georas 2000; R. Rivera 2003; Rodríguez-Morazzani 1996:153). Roberto P. Rodríguez-Morazzani (1996) states that the comparable racialization of African Americans and Puerto Ricans, especially in New York City, "could lead anyone unfamiliar with the existence of the two different groups to view them as one, or as a hyphenated signifier, i.e. African American-Puerto Rican" (153). Although dominant constructions of "Puerto Rican" and "African American" identities in the United States distinguish between the two groups, these depictions also include comparable stereotypes that reinforce the groups' positions as "colonial/racial" subjects within the U.S.

Because of the dominant racialization of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. as similar to African Americans, migration to the United States has comprised what Juan Flores (2009) terms a "lesson in blackness" for some Puerto Rican migrants (47). Flores (2009) argues that many Puerto Rican migrants, along with Dominicans and Cubans, experience anti-black racism in the United States that causes them to develop affinity with African American communities. Of course, as Raquel Z. Rivera (1996, 2003) points out, despite these shared experiences with racism, rifts exist between Puerto Rican and African American communities, often because some Puerto Rican migrants harbor anti-black sentiment as a result of their exposure to the whitening bias of hegemonic discourses of racial democracy in Puerto Rico (R. Rivera 1996:209; R. Rivera 2003:32-34). In addition, although Nuyoricans as a whole have been racialized similarly to African Americans, Afro-Puerto Rican migrants experience migration and racism much differently than non-black Puerto Ricans (J. Flores 2005; Jiménez Román 2008). Nevertheless,

the dominant racialization of Nuyoricans as similar to African Americans results in the forging of new political, social, and cultural affiliations between the two groups as they struggle against comparable experiences of racial exclusion.

Musical collaborations between Nuyoricans and African Americans manifest the processes of cultural exchange and affinity between the two groups. Popular music genres such as Latin jazz, Latin soul, and boogaloo all resulted from African American and Nuyoricans collaboration, and appealed to both audiences (J. Flores 2000; Pacini Hernández 2010; R. Rivera 2003). Likewise, hip hop also emerged from cross-cultural exchange between West Indians, African Americans, and Nuyoricans in the South Bronx neighborhood of New York City (R. Rivera 2003). Several Nuyoricans played critical roles in the formation of hip hop culture.<sup>6</sup> For example, Charlie Chase, a DJ of Puerto Rican descent, was a member of one of the pioneering hip hop groups, the Cold Crush Brothers. Nuyoricans dancers like Popmaster Fabel and Crazy Legs of the Rock Steady Crew created innovative breakdance styles that became central elements of hip hop culture. According to Raquel Z. Rivera (2003), hip hop enabled Nuyoricans youth to negotiate new racial identities based on shared experiences of marginalization with other African diasporic populations in the United States. In other words, through their participation in hip hop, Nuyoricans youth engaged in an African diasporic space that illuminated new links between blackness and Puerto Rican identity.

The migration between New York and Puerto Rico connects individuals traveling between the two places, and impacts the flow of cultural practices between them (Giovanetti 2003; R. Rivera 1996:206). Consequently, the circular migration of people and globalization of cultural practices fosters not only a critical revisioning of the colonial/racial subject positionality of Nuyoricans in the U.S., but also of blackness in Puerto Rico. For example, in his interviews with Puerto Rican circular migrants between the United States and Puerto Rico, Juan Flores (2009) notes that many migrants' experiences in the U.S. led them to question the salience of dominant constructions of racial democracy in Puerto Rico (144). Puerto Rican return migrants from New York thus brought with them to the island new ideas about the compatibility of blackness and Puerto Rican identity developed in part through their encounters with other African diasporic populations in the United States (J. Flores 2009).

Likewise, return migrants to Puerto Rico also brought with them cultural practices such as hip hop from the United States to the island. As Vico C's story illustrates, Puerto Rican youth in the *caseríos* related to the experiences of marginalization expressed by rappers in the United States (R. Rivera 1997a:112). Wayne Marshall (2009) claims that underground in mid-1990s Puerto Rico "supported a youth- and class-inflected cultural politics of blackness and did so, significantly, by embracing (if not amplifying) the Nuyoricans dimension of Puerto Rican popular culture" (47).<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Raquel Z. Rivera (1992/1993) has argued that while underground

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<sup>6</sup> Hip hop culture includes three interrelated cultural practices: "MCing" or rapping, breakdancing, and graffiti art.

<sup>7</sup> Despite scholars' assertion that Nuyoricans participation in hip hop is critical to the development of underground in Puerto Rico, I have found different views among some artists on the island. Tego Calderón claimed that Nuyoricans' participation in the development of hip hop meant that hip hop could be considered Puerto Rican music, even though it is not "traditional" (Personal Communication, 29 February 2008). On the other hand, Vico C distinguished between Nuyoricans involvement in U.S. rap and the rap and reggaetón scenes on the island. Vico C, who was born in Brooklyn but identifies as a Puerto Rican rather than Nuyoricans, claims that reggaetón is "very flavored...very danceable, very sexy, very kind of African...and that tends to put it more in Puerto Rico than in New



incorporated many influences from U.S. hip hop, it also “islandized” hip hop culture in order to address the specific issues facing Puerto Rican youth on the island. As a result, underground “provoked new sensibilities on issues of sex, gender, and race, while rap’s social moorings among the urban poor raised uncomfortable problems of class and social inequality virtually absent in other forms of popular music and typically ignored by the cultural elite” in Puerto Rico (J. Flores 2009:164). The development of hip hop in New York and the experiences of Nuyoricans serve as critical diasporic resources for underground artists whose participation in diasporic space enables them to create new ideas about blackness that respond to the local conditions within *caseríos*.

## The Development of Underground in Puerto Rico

The influence of hip hop in underground is evident in many of the beats pieced together by Puerto Rican DJs at house parties and recordings. DJs received vinyl records from New York and mixed them together using turn tables and speakers while artists such as Vico C rapped original lyrics over the music. Underground DJs also combined U.S. hip hop beats with popular Jamaican dancehall riddims.<sup>8</sup> While some Jamaican dancehall songs arrived in Puerto Rico after having been popular in New York, Panamanian *reggae en español* also popularized dancehall riddims on the island. Panamanian artists, including Panamanian immigrants in New York, had been recording over Jamaican dancehall beats throughout the 1980s (Marshall 2009; Twickel 2009a).<sup>9</sup> In some cases, these songs were direct translations of Jamaican hits into Spanish, and at other times Panamanian artists wrote original Spanish lyrics which they performed with the rapid vocals typical of Jamaican dancehall. As with U.S. rap, Puerto Ricans received *reggae en español* and Jamaican dancehall recordings through communication with individuals in New York (Marshall 2009:34). Just as they had done with rap from the United States, Puerto Rican artists performed over *reggae en español* beats at house parties and in clubs, partly because, according to DJ Negro, Panamanian artists were extremely difficult to bring to Puerto Rico to perform (*Chosen Few*; Marshall 2009:34).<sup>10</sup> These combinations of hip hop and dancehall beats

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York.” Still, Vico C considers rap in Spanish a Puerto Rican phenomenon because of its presence on the island (Personal Communication, 10 January 2008). Despite these differences in opinion, I maintain that the Nuyorican experience is a critical aspect of the process of mutual recognition that created underground.

<sup>8</sup> Jamaican reggae was also popular in Puerto Rico; however, as Jorge L. Giovanetti (2003) notes, reggae was more popular among upper class, predominantly white Puerto Ricans. Surfers especially gravitated towards reggae and appropriated the fashion associated with Rastafarianism, despite the fact that many of these fans’ lifestyles were “contradictory to the traditional Rasta lifestyle in Jamaica” (Giovanetti 2003:84). The reggae popular among the upper class white communities of Puerto Rico should not be confused with Jamaican dancehall or Panamanian *reggae en español*, which was popular among working class and predominantly black youth.

<sup>9</sup> For example, the immensely popular El General, often credited for putting *reggae en español* on the map, recorded several songs while living in New York. Many of El General’s most famous recordings, including “*Tu Pum Pum*” and “*Te Ves Buena*”, gained popularity in Latin America via his recordings since, as an undocumented immigrant in the United States, he could not travel to promote himself until relatively late in his career (Twickel 2009a:103-105).

<sup>10</sup> It is also important to note that Puerto Ricans also influenced Panamanian artists. One of the popular innovators of Panamanian *reggae en español*, Renato, recalls that Vico C was the first Puerto Rican rapper to become popular in Panama during the 1990s (Nwankwo 2009:95). He also lists other popular underground artists such as Ivy Queen, Don Chezina, OG Black, and Mexicano as popular performers in Panama (Nwankwo 2009:95). Contemporary reggaetón artists like Ivy Queen, Don Omar, Daddy Yankee, Nicky Jam, and Héctor y Tito also appear frequently in Panama (Nwankwo 2009:96).

formed the basis of what has popularly become recognized as underground. Vico C describes the critical roles of dancehall and hip hop in the development of underground:

Panama started digging dancehall before Puerto Ricans started digging dancehall. Puerto Ricans started digging hip hop before Panama started digging hip hop...But, you can't call something reggaetón without the hip hop elements, at least the lyrical expressions when it comes to making lyrics, you know, and you can't call something reggaetón if you don't have the dancehall element... And underground is the same thing as what they call reggaetón now... What it really is, is dancehall created by Jamaicans and developed in Panama in Spanish, and hip hop created in the Bronx going to Puerto Rico, [Puerto Ricans] doing it in Spanish, and when El General, El General I think was the first artist that we knew about with dancehall in Puerto Rico, when he went there, we were already [in Puerto Rico] with our thing [i.e. hip hop]...Eventually, Puerto Ricans started not only giving [dancehall] a lot of flow and more of a hip hop flow, but putting hip hop beats mixed with [it]... The essence of this movement they call reggaetón right now is in Puerto Rico because it was Puerto Rico that gave it the sound that people really dig in the whole world (Personal Communication, 10 Jan. 2008).

Vico C's comments also reveal how underground did not just copy hip hop and dancehall, but also involved the creation of new sounds unique to the Puerto Rican experience. Indeed, Puerto Rican DJs eventually obtained beat machines that allowed them to compose original beats. Underground mixtapes, especially those by DJ Playero (the Playero series) and DJ Negro (the Noise series), featured new beats composed by the DJs that sampled from popular hip hop and dancehall of their time (Marshall 2009:40, 42, 45). For example, *Playero 37*, one of the mixtapes produced by DJ Playero in 1992, features numerous artists such as Daddy Yankee, OG Black, Lisa M, and others rapping in Spanish over popular dancehall beats with hip hop samples interspersed throughout. In certain songs, vocalists sing the same melodies from the original samples, but often with different lyrics. The mixtape shifts rapidly from one artist to the next without any space between vocalists or beat changes. The hip hop and dancehall sampling selections included in the mixtapes "localiz[ed] the foreign-but-familiar" to create a unique expression of Puerto Rican identity informed by underground artists' experiences growing up in the working class urban neighborhoods of Puerto Rico (Marshall 2009:40; see also Giovanetti 2003; Santos Febres 1996a; Santos Febres 1996b).

In addition to musical productions, the visual art included on the mixtapes' packaging also reflected this working class black identity. For example, DJ Playero's series of mixtapes from the mid-1990s often featured urban landscapes, graffiti, and "lots of images of stylish, and often dark-skinned, denizens of the underground" on their covers (Marshall 2009:40). Indeed, clothing and hairstyles borrowed from popular hip hop fashion in the U.S. also dominated the undergrounds scene of the 1990s (Giovanetti 2003:86; Marshall 2009:40). Many of these styles included overt signifiers of blackness, such as dreadlock hairstyles, pendants emblazoned with the continent of Africa, and "Rastafarian" colored (i.e. black, yellow, and green) hats, shirts, and jewelry (Giovanetti 2003:86; Marshall 2009:40). Styles of dress and hairstyles influenced by hip hop culture in the United States served as important physical representations of affiliations with other African diasporic populations for Puerto Rican underground artists and fans.

Likewise, the vocabulary used to describe underground and its artists emphasized the music's connections with blackness. Many underground rappers chose monikers that indicated

their self-identifications with blackness, such as OG Black, DJ Negro, and Prieto M.C. (R. Rivera 1997a:123 R. Rivera 1997b:254; Santos Febres 1996b:230). Furthermore, frequent references to underground as “*melaza*” [molasses] and “*música negra*” [black music] demonstrated underground’s connections to particular black subjectivities (Santos Febres 1996:230). Since underground was partly a product of the *caseríos*, dominant representations of the music attributed certain stereotypes of abject blackness onto underground artists and fans (I will elaborate upon this point later in this chapter); however, the blackness expressed by underground artists and fans integrated diasporic resources to refute this abject blackness.

Underground lyrics revealed the ways diasporic affiliations influenced their constructions of alternative understandings of blackness. In an early 1990s rap, underground artist Eddie Dee maintained that he chose to identify with African Americans as opposed to *jibaros*:

*Yo sí copio de los morenos*  
*Porque si no copio de ellos*  
*De quién voy a copiar*  
*¿De Tavín Pumarejo?*

I do copy African Americans  
Because if I don’t copy them  
Who am I going to copy?  
Tavín Pumarejo?

(qtd. in R. Rivera 2007:219)

Raquel Z. Rivera (2007) describes Tavín Pumarejo as a “clownish *jibaro* figure” popular on Puerto Rican television (219). As described in Chapter Two, Puerto Rican writers such as Antonio Pedreira who created the foundations of dominant constructions of racial democracy often exalted a white *jibaro* figure that embodied Puerto Rican national identity, especially the island’s Spanish heritage. The “clownish” representation of Tavín Pumarejo alludes to the elite nature of dominant constructions of the *jibaro* that simultaneously celebrated the figure as a symbol of a romanticized Spanish past and stereotyped the working class “simple” lifestyle of farmers in the interior of the island (Guerra 1998). Thus, Eddie Dee’s identifying more closely with African Americans than Tavín Pumarejo suggests his critique of the elitist constructions of racial democracy. In choosing to “copy” African Americans, Eddie Dee reveals the contradiction embedded within hegemonic discourses of racial democracy that rely on race mixture yet simultaneously negate contemporary black identities. Indeed, implicit in the critique is an understanding that these dominant constructions of Puerto Rican identity elide possibilities to claim particular black identities that are connected to the African diaspora. Moreover, his decision to eschew identification with the *jibaro* figure in favor of African Americans reveals how Eddie Dee recognizes more similarities with African diasporic communities than with dominant constructions of Puerto Rican identity.

Beyond questions of racial and national self-identifications, underground also addressed themes related to life in the *caseríos*. Descriptions of a myriad of social issues facing *caserío* residents including poverty, violence, and drug abuse are common in underground lyrics. Many of the songs in Vico C’s early repertoire include commentaries about *caserío* life that are typical of underground songs. Vico C’s “*La Recta Final*” [The Final Stretch] (1989) describes violence, drug addiction, sexual abuse, and prevalence of AIDS in Puerto Rico’s poor communities. Other songs by Vico C include “*Xplosión*” [Explosion] (1993) about violence and the drug trade in

*caseríos*, and “Tony Presidio” (1990) about a young assassin who works for drug lords. On the one hand, many of these songs attempt to decry the systemic injustices and insufficient resources that impact *caserío* residents. At the same time, their descriptions of urban life may also be interpreted as recuperating certain stereotypes of abject blackness. Despite such ambiguities, however, underground provided an opportunity for artists and fans to voice concerns regarding their particular experiences with racism and classism in Puerto Rico.

Many of Vico C’s songs criticize members of Puerto Rico’s elite class for ignoring and, at times, exacerbating the socioeconomic issues facing working class Puerto Ricans, even when some of the working class protagonists of the songs are presented as responsible for their own situations.<sup>11</sup> For example, in “*La Recta Final*”, Vico C raps that “corrupt” upper classes share responsibility for perpetuating the conditions in *caseríos* with the individuals who commit crimes within the *caseríos* (“*La clase alta también tiene culpa de los actos/¿Por qué?/Por la corrupción, exacto*” [The upper class is also guilty of these actions/Why?/Because of corruption]). Likewise, in “*Xplosión*” (1993), Vico C explicitly criticized the racial and class biases expressed by upper class Puerto Ricans:

*Yo no entiendo porque ponen valor  
A la posición social y también al color  
Oye, racista, más poderoso es el amor  
Que su estúpido empeño de tener el control  
Como quiera en el futuro no podrás evitar  
Que tu hija con un negrito se vaya a casar  
Y yo no soy de alta posición social  
Pero su hijo mi cassette se lo quiere comprar.*

I don’t understand why they give value  
To your social position and to your color  
Listen, racist, love is more powerful  
Than your stupid determination on having control  
Whatever, in the future you won’t be able to avoid  
That your daughter will get married to a black man,  
And I’m not from a high social position,  
But your kid wants to buy my cassette.

Vico’s description of the upper class girl marrying a black man and the young upper class boy buying rap CDs insists on the recognition of commonalities across racial and class lines. Although Vico C does not explicitly state the race of the upper class individuals he speaks to in the song, they are assumed to be “*blanquitos*”; literally translated as “little whites,” *blanquito* refers to the predominantly white elite in Puerto Rico. When applied to a white person, *blanquito* often implies “an elitist, snobbish attitude or lifestyle” (Godreau 2008:6).<sup>12</sup> Vico C’s discussion of the *racista*’s insistence on maintaining racial and class divisions can therefore be read as a critique of *blanquito* elitism. In the process, Vico C exposes one of the main contradictions

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<sup>11</sup> Mayra Santos Febres (1996a) has argued that the criticism of broader societal structures that impact the *caseríos* diminished with increased commercialization of underground. She claims that rappers provided advice from their position as fellow individuals from the “street” that advocated more “personal” solutions to problems of crime that centered on the “*cánones de moral religiosa y estatal*” [religious morality and state canons] (Santos Febres 1996a:126).

<sup>12</sup> Sometimes, wealthy blacks are also called *blanquitos*. Isar P. Godreau (2008) states that in these cases the term “*blanquito*” accuses wealthy blacks of “acting white” (6).

embedded within dominant discourses of racial democracy—that is, the persistence of racism despite the prevailing assumption of racial harmony. By discrediting elite Puerto Ricans’ attempts to distinguish themselves from residents in the *caseríos*, Vico also contests the dominant portrayal of *caseríos* as emplacements of abject blackness. Rather, the emphasis on the inevitable cross-racial and cross-class connections that occur when, for example, the elites’ daughter marries a black man, recognizes the humanity of *caserío* residents that is denied by dominant constructions of abject blackness. Highlighting these commonalities also suggests the need for the integration of *caserío* residents in Puerto Rican society and, subsequently, recognition of their full rights as citizens.

Several underground artists produced songs that countered their criminalization in the media, pointing out that the dominant portrayals of them as “delinquents” resulted in their experiencing various forms of class and race discrimination. Mayra Santos Febres (1996b) argues that underground rappers were “thrice criminalized” based on their particular race (black), gender (male), and class (working class) positions in Puerto Rico (226). Because of the stereotypes associated with rappers, Santos Febres (1996b) states that “the rapper develops responses, some rhetorical, others real, to establish himself or herself and confront his or her marginalization” (226). As one strategy to confront this marginalization, underground artists wrote lyrics detailing their experiences with discrimination. For example, on a 1992 recording, Ivy Queen rapped that “Us rappers are victims of discrimination/We are also put in jail/Just for being who we are” (qtd. in R. Rivera 1997b:251). Eddie Dee has also produced several songs addressing the stigma and discrimination against rappers in Puerto Rico, including more contemporary recordings such as “*En Peligro de Extinción*” [In Danger of Extinction] included in his 2000 album *El Terrorista de la Lírica* [The Lyrical Terrorist] and “*Censurarme por Ser Rapero*” [Censor Me for Being a Rapper] on his 2004 *Doce Discipulos* [12 Disciples] album.

One of Eddie Dee’s popular underground hits, “*Señor Oficial*” [Mr. Officer], addressed the police brutality faced by many underground artists and fans. Although he had performed the song since 1995, Eddie Dee received newspaper coverage about the song in 1997 after it had been nominated in the best lyrics category of a national “Rap and Reggae” competition (J. Pérez 1997). In 1997, *El Nuevo Día* published the lyrics to the popular song, which the reporter described as “*un llamado de comprensión que el rapero le hace a su enemigo, el policía*” [a call for understanding that the rapper directs towards his enemy, the police] (J. Pérez 1997:80). Eddie Dee points out the hypocrisy of government officials who harassed rappers and their fans for doing the same activities that the officers did when they were young:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <i>Señor oficial,</i>                               | Mr. Officer,   |
| <i>Por qué los suyos persiguen</i>                  | Why do your people persecute                           |
| <i>A los raperos que en tarima exhiben</i>          | Rappers who perform on stage                           |
| <i>Estamos en el party y lo mandan a apagar</i>     | We are at the party, and you tell us to turn it        |
| <i>Sin saber que estoy cantando para mi madre</i>   | off  |
| <i>ayudar</i>                                       | Without even knowing that I sing to help my            |
| <i>Y por qué...</i>                                 | mother,  |
| <i>Por qué si voy para la esquina me quieren</i>    | Why...   |
| <i>voltear</i>                                      | If I go to the corner do you want to search me         |
| <i>Si voy al caserío se creen que voy a comprar</i> | If I go to the <i>caserío</i> you think that I’m going |

*Si salgo en mi carro usted me manda a parar*  
*Porque prendo el equipo o me ve con celular*  
*Me juzgan como si algo malo hice*  
*Yo sólo canto rap, pues fue lo que quise*  
*Ahora hago esto pa' que gente analice*  
*Y escuche el coro que dice:*  
*Señor oficial*  
*Déjeme cantar mi canción*  
*Señor oficial*  
*Déjeme ser como yo soy*

to buy drugs  
 If I go out in my car you make me stop  
 Because I turned on the stereo or you see me  
 with my cell phone,  
 They judge me like I did something bad  
 But I only sing rap, well that's all I wanted to  
 do,  
 Now I do this so that people can analyze things  
 And listen to the chorus that says:  
 Mr. Officer,  
 Let me sing my song  
 Mr. Officer,  
 Let me be who I am

Similar to Vico C's lyrics addressing elite Puerto Ricans, Eddie Dee's "call for understanding" involves listing commonalities between himself and the police. Eddie Dee argues that the allegedly criminal activities for which police target rappers are similar to the things that these officers did when they were young (*Comprenda que usted hizo hace tiempo/Las cosas que yo hago hoy* [Understand that a while ago you did/The things that I do now]). In response to the criticisms that underground encouraged drug use and violence,<sup>13</sup> Eddie Dee raps "*Estoy molesto por todas las cosas/Que estoy viendo/Como la droga y la gente que está muriendo/Pero también me enfada escuchar gente diciendo/Que es culpa de nosotros lo que está sucediendo*" [I am bothered by all the things/That I am seeing/ Like drugs and people dying/But I also get angry when I hear people saying/That what is happening is our [rappers'] fault]." Eddie repeats in the chorus that he is neither a thief nor a murder, but just a "*cantante que lo hace de corazón*" [an singer who sings from the heart]. Like Vico C, Eddie Dee's claims that rappers and "*oficiales*" are more similar than different rejects the stereotypical tropes of abject blackness attributed to many underground artists.

The accompanying music video for "*Señor Oficial*" underscores the racial component of Eddie Dee's descriptions of the discrimination faced by rappers. The video begins when Eddie Dee emerges from his dark SUV to meet up with some friends on the corner. The young men are dressed in "hip hop" style, with baggy jean shorts, oversized t-shirts, sneakers, and some with baseball caps. While Eddie Dee's friends have short haircuts and appear racially ambiguous, Eddie Dee is black and wears shoulder-length dreadlocks. As he greets his friends, a group of police officers approaches the young men, guns drawn. They throw Eddie Dee and his friends on the ground and handcuff and search them. Then, Eddie Dee, the only black youth with dreadlocks in the group, is arrested and driven to the station.

Once there, Eddie Dee participates in a line up with three other men. Like Eddie Dee, the other men involved in the line up are young, black, and wear dreadlocks. The camera pans across the men holding their identification numbers as if the viewer were the person identifying someone in the lineup. Then, the men leave the room, Eddie Dee and the first two men smiling

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<sup>13</sup> I will discuss the multiple criticisms leveled against underground in the next section of this chapter.

with relief. The final man stares at the camera, shakes his head, and throws his paper with his number on it at the camera, as if he were disgusted with being considered a suspect.

After the lineup, Eddie Dee appears at a press conference wearing a black suit and tie. He stands at podium where he says he will address “*a esa gente/Que nos critican pero no hablan de frente./Esos dicen que la juventud se está perdiendo/Y culpan al rapero que en vídeo está saliendo*” [the people who criticize us but don’t tell us to our face./They say that the youth is getting lost/and they fault the rapper in the music video]. Eddie Dee then claims that underground artists and fans are equal to their critics “*en los ojos de Dios*” [in the eyes of God], and admonishes parents who blame underground for “damaging” their children. As part of his critique, Eddie Dee describes the discrimination he faces because of his “look”: “*Dicen que mi recorte y mis pantallas están mal/ Si visto con mi estilo al pub no me dejan entrar/ Y cuando entro a una tienda se creen que voy a asaltar*” [They say that my haircut and my earrings are bad/If I dress in my style they don’t let me enter the pub/And when I enter a store they think that I am going to assault them]. In addition to the visual images of the black male suspects at the police station, Eddie Dee’s reference to his haircut and style refers to the particular diasporic resources that many underground artists and fans borrow from hip hop. In this vein, his criticisms of the racial profiling he experiences as a result of this “*estilo*” refutes the association between underground artists and abject blackness in dominant portrayals of underground by the media. Rather, Eddie Dee claims that as a rapper and as a black man, he deserves equal rights as other Puerto Ricans.

After the press conference, it appears that Eddie Dee has been released from police custody. He meets with the officer who arrested him in a restaurant. The officer is an older black man. Eddie Dee wears a baseball cap, baggy jeans, a large necklace and a white t-shirt, while the officer wears similar clothing apart from his hair, which is in a “military-style” haircut. Eddie Dee tells the officer that they are more similar than the officer thinks. Throughout the conversation, the officer appears pensive and at times covers his face with his hands. At the end of the conversation, Eddie Dee shakes hands with the officer, pays the bill, and leaves the restaurant. Although the officer and Eddie Dee are both black, the officer’s social position and appearance portray him as distinct from the abject blackness that informs dominant representations of underground artists and is attributed to Eddie Dee. Ultimately, the video and lyrics for “*Señor Oficial*” reject the stigmatization of blackness as abjection upon which dominant portrayals of *caseríos* and their residents (including underground artists) rely. In the song, Eddie Dee underscores the disconnect between claims of a raceless society by dominant discourses of racial democracy with young black male youth’s everyday experiences with racial profiling and police brutality. In the process, Eddie Dee both argues for equal rights for working class and black Puerto Ricans, and embraces a black identity that incorporates diasporic resources from elsewhere in the Americas to counter the dominant portrayals of both emplaced abject blackness within *caseríos* and the whitened “ideal” of Puerto Rican national identity.

While underground contests some of the abject representations of blackness, certain images or lyrics also affirm particular stereotypes associated with blackness, particularly in terms of hypersexuality (R. Rivera 2009:115). In addition to songs about racism and classism, other popular lyrical themes included drug use, especially marijuana, and sexual exploits (Santos Febres 1996b:224). Underground must therefore be considered a “dangerous crossroad” that challenges certain ideas about blackness while simultaneously holding the potential to reinforce

other stereotypes (Lipsitz 1994). Still, underground provided a critical space where young black youth living in the *caseríos* could respond to their everyday experiences with classism and racism, particularly during and in the aftermath of the *Mano Dura* campaign.

Because underground was affiliated with the same working class black communities targeted by *Mano Dura* policies, the music itself also became the focus of anti-crime and anti-drug campaigns. Around 1994, some “mainstream” stores began selling underground recordings, ending its exclusive circulation in informal channels (Marshall 2009:38; R. Rivera 1998). In 1995, police raided record stores to confiscate underground cassettes and CDs. The Drugs and Vice Control Bureau of the police department raided six stores, including three in the upscale mall, Plaza de las Américas (R. Rivera 2009:112, 116). The raids ignited a debate about the obscenity of underground, in many ways foreshadowing the Senate hearings about reggaetón music videos held in 2002.<sup>14</sup> Critics of underground alleged that the music inspired criminal activity and drug abuse among youth in Puerto Rico. Indeed, Eddie Dee’s “*Señor Oficial*” video was released soon after these debates surfaced in the Puerto Rican media, and many of the criticisms of the music which he highlights in his lyrics mirror the typical arguments leveled against underground at the time. However, as Eddie Dee’s video implies, underlying these debates about underground were anxieties regarding the insertion of new ideas about blackness that circulated alongside the music in Puerto Rico. Of particular concern was the potential that this new “diasporic” blackness could disrupt the hegemony of dominant constructions of racial democracy. Underground had become out of place via its distribution in more “mainstream” channels, and critics of the music sought to reiterate the stereotypes of abject blackness that had been attributed to *caseríos* in an attempt to maintain hegemonic discourses of racial democracy.

### **“Rap, Soy Boricua pa’ que tú lo Sepas”**

On March 15, 1995, the newspaper *El Nuevo Día* published an article detailing the activities of the “Task Force” of the *Programa Zona Escolar Libre de Drogas y Armas* [Drug and Gun Free School Zone Program]. Officials entered schools in Arecibo, Humacao, Loíza, Caguas, San Juan and Luquillo to look for drug paraphernalia. The article listed items that the Task Force considered indicative of individuals’ participation with drugs: “*Picadura de marihuana, jeringuillas y sobres con supuesta droga, canecas de alcohol, música ‘underground’, ‘beepers’ y teléfonos celulares*” [Marijuana, syringes and envelopes with suspected drugs, bottles of alcohol, underground music, beepers and cell phones] (Millan Pabon 1995). These were among the confiscated materials occupied by the Task Force during the school raids.

The school inspections took place approximately one month after police seized the underground recordings at record stores. The inclusion of underground recordings among the contraband items seized at schools reveals the extent to which underground had been criminalized within Puerto Rican society.<sup>15</sup> The popular association between drug use, crime,

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<sup>14</sup> I discuss the 2002 campaign in the next chapter.

<sup>15</sup> Besides the actual raids, school policies also stigmatized underground music. For example, many schools enforced dress codes that banned the baggy blue jeans and t-shirts popular among underground fans (Giovanetti 2003).



and underground persisted even though a judge had dismissed charges against store owners accused of violating obscenity laws because they sold underground (R. Rivera 1998:140; *San Juan Star* 1995). Besides concerns around obscenity and morality in underground, critics of underground also argued that the music's "foreign" origins as rap in the United States provided evidence of U.S. American cultural imperialism (e.g. see R. Rivera 1998; R. Rivera 2009).

Criticisms of underground were intimately connected to underground's explicit links to blackness. The raids on record stores as well as the school inspections occurred towards the end of the *Mano Dura* campaign. As mentioned previously, *Mano Dura* cemented the emplacement of blackness as abject within *caseríos*. The movement of underground out of *caseríos* into other sectors of Puerto Rican society, as evidenced by their sale in stores in the Plaza de las Américas, disrupted the boundaries of Puerto Rico's cultural topography that had sought to contain abject blackness within the *caseríos*' gates. What's more, underground's push beyond the confines of the emplaced blackness in *caseríos* could potentially disrupt the hegemony of discourses of racial democracy because, as the discussion of Vico C and Eddie Dee evinces, many of the lyrics revealed the prevalence of racism on the island, thus refuting the assumption that Puerto Rico was a "raceless" society. Consequently, classification of underground as "foreign" and "obscene" attempted to portray the music and the communities from which it came as distinct from Puerto Rican national identity.

A common argument against underground was what Raquel Z. Rivera (1997a; 1998; 2009) termed the "cultural imperialism" perspective. These critics of underground claimed that the music reinforced Puerto Rico's colonial position vis-à-vis the United States because it actively displaced other, more "authentic" Puerto Rican traditions. Nevertheless, these "cultural imperialism" critiques implied a link between "foreignness" and "blackness." Such critiques employed a cultural nationalism that upheld the whitening biases intrinsic to dominant discourses of racial democracy and, in the process, repeatedly located blackness as outside of both the physical and "moral" boundaries of Puerto Rican identity.

One of the most frequently cited editorials regarding underground's "foreign" roots is "*Rapeo sobre el rap en Ciales*" [I'm rapping about rap in Ciales] (1996) published by Edwin Reyes in the leftist periodical *Claridad* (see R. Rivera 1998; R. Rivera 2009). Reyes described his participation in a school function in the town of Ciales that celebrated the founding of Puerto Rico. After screening a brief documentary about Luis Palés Matos to the students, Reyes followed them into the auditorium of the school to find, to his horror, a rap concert. Throughout his editorial, Reyes admonishes school officials for inviting rappers to the celebration of Puerto Rican culture because, in his estimation, not only is rap associated with "*la subcultura de la droga y la violencia callejera de pandillas*" [drug subculture and gang street violence], but it is also not Puerto Rican. He notes that rap began in the "*ghettos negros e hispanos de Norteamérica*" [black and Hispanic ghettos of North America] as a "*forma primitiva de expresión musical que se presta perfectamente para transmitir las formas más elementales de emoción*" [primitive form of musical expression that lends itself perfectly to broadcasting the most primordial forms of emotion]. Reyes's descriptions of rap music present it not just as foreign, but also black. First, his reference to the "black and Hispanic ghettos" of North America underscores hip hop's origins in distinctly racialized places outside of Puerto Rico. Such reasoning positions blackness outside of the Puerto Rican national space; moreover, the comment also follows dominant representations of Nuyoricans as both "African Americanized"

and not authentic Puerto Ricans (see Chapter Three). At the same time, Reyes's comments also allude to many of the tropes of abject blackness when he describes rap as "primitive," "primordial," and "violent." Reyes' use of these terms reiterates the position of blackness as the "primitive" counterpoint to whiteness in the racial hierarchies consistent with European modernity. Rather than the "*tontería de rap*" [stupidity of rap], Reyes advocates that Puerto Rican youth should listen to "*la música nuestra, erudita y popular, múltiple, bella, irreductible...la música sublime de la puertorriqueñidad*" [our music, sophisticated and popular, varied, beautiful, irreducible...the sublime music of Puerto Ricanness].

Of course, Reyes implies the inclusion of Luis Palés Matos, a poet who addressed Afro-Puerto Rican life and culture, in his depiction of "sublime" Puerto Rican culture; however, as I discussed in Chapter Two, Luis Palés Matos's poetry follows the folkloric blackness that has been integrated into dominant constructions of racial democracy. Thus, Reyes's editorial maintains the contradiction in hegemonic discourses of racial democracy that strategically include certain perceptions of blackness while simultaneously excluding others. His editorial highlights the ways in which the particular abject blackness associated with dominant portrayals of "stupid" rap music is situated as fundamentally distinct from Puerto Rican national identity.

Another editorial published in *Claridad* two years earlier also exemplifies the cultural imperialism argument leveled against underground. Fernando Clemente (1994) considers rap as one of many U.S. cultural fads imported into Puerto Rico, similar to the hula-hoops, mini-skirts and "psychadelic" clothing of his youth. Throughout the editorial, Clemente depicts these cultural fads as relatively benign, and the unfortunate results of broader processes of globalization and capitalism. Clemente describes generational conflicts around popular culture trends and his own preferences to avoid fads of younger generations. However, despite his history of relatively innocent U.S. cultural influences in Puerto Rico, Clemente identifies rap as a particularly insufferable and damaging cultural import. Clemente begins his assault on rap by describing young men piercing their ears and noses; he claims that in his time, the only men wearing earrings were "*los piratas y los gitanos de las películas; y solamente los toros tenía aros incrustados en la nariz*" [pirates and gypsies in the movies; and only bulls had hoops inlaid in their noses]. Clemente argues that these piercings form part of a "rapper-look" that is detrimental to Puerto Rican society:

*¿Y a quién le conviene el 'rapper-look' y – peor aún – el 'rapper conduct'? ¿A la cultura puertorriqueña? ¡Definitivamente NO [sic]! Lo que nos lleva es, querrámoslo o no, a nuestra condición colonial y a la prepotencia vulgar al poder económico estadounidense.*

[And who benefits from this "rapper-look" and – even worse – the "rapper conduct"? Puerto Rican culture? Definitely NOT! What it does, whether we like it or not, is perpetuate our colonial condition and the vulgar economic power of the United States.]

Raquel Z. Rivera (2009) claims that Clemente's arguments against rap constitute the typical cultural imperialism argument, "as if rap were not already an integral part of Puerto Rican culture" (124; see also R. Rivera 1998:130).

Beyond the cultural imperialism argument, however, Clemente's editorial employs racialized language and imagery that also distinguishes blackness from Puerto Rican identity.

Considering Clemente's relatively dismissive attitude towards cultural practices that are associated with "mainstream" white U.S. American culture (i.e. hula hoops and "make love not war" t-shirts), his virulent admonishing of "rapper-looks" and "rapper conduct" implies that it is rap's associations with blackness that makes the music and anything associated with it so "damaging" to Puerto Rican culture.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, although Clemente does not provide a detailed definition of "rapper conduct," his description of the negative impact of this "conduct" on Puerto Rican society implies that the stereotypical behavior associated with rappers and their fans does not conform to the "respectability" and "values" of Puerto Rican society. The visual image accompanying the editorial emphasizes the presumed racial distinctions between rappers and Puerto Rican identity. Located in the center of the text is a black and white drawing of a man with a goatee and long hair. The wide nose and curly hair signify that the man is of African descent. He wears large hoop earrings, a patterned jacket and belt, and makes a hand gesture that alludes to a gang sign. The juxtaposition of this caricature of a young, black, male rap fan with the editorial claiming that rapper conduct damages Puerto Rican culture reinscribes the modern racial hierarchies that portray blackness as "primitive" and whiteness as "civilized." Therefore, Clemente positions underground as an example of abject blackness while attempting to align Puerto Ricanness with the values and characteristics of European modernity. Similar to Reyes, then, Clemente depicts underground as a "threat" to dominant constructions of Puerto Rican identity as a so-called racial democracy.

The question of "rapper conduct" also surfaced in criticisms of underground as "immoral" and "obscene" that pervaded the Puerto Rican media once the obscenity charges against record store owners selling underground had been dismissed. Shortly after the raids, Yolanda Rosaly (1995) published an editorial in *El Nuevo Día* about the potentially negative affects of underground on Puerto Rican youth. Rosaly argued that readers should protect children from underground, or what she termed the "*sub-mundo*" [underworld], and "*así colaborará en un 100 por ceinto a mejorar la calidad de vida en Puerto Rico*" [that way you will help improve the quality of life in Puerto Rico 100 percent]. To combat underground, Rosaly urged adults to talk to children about the music, and

*insistale en que, fomentando este tipo de música, no ayuda para nada al sano y positivo desarrollo de la generación, de la que todos estamos muy orgullosos y de la que tantas acciones buenas esperarnos. Y, más importante aún, presénteles alternativas sobre mejores y más creativas formas para distraerse.*

[insist to them that promoting this type of music does not help the healthy and positive development of their generation at all, the generation that we are all proud of and that we hope will do great things. And, even more important, present them with alternatives for better and more creative ways to distract themselves.]

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<sup>16</sup> Clemente's apparent acceptance of mainstream U.S. cultural practices along with his rejection of rap mirror some of the broader divisions in the Puerto Rican popular music scene. Besides rap, one of the more popular music genres in 1980s and 1990s Puerto Rico was rock and roll from the United States and Europe. Rock groups such as Poison and the Police sold out stadiums in Puerto Rico. Since the 1970s, rock music was associated with middle and upper class, predominantly white audiences in Puerto Rico rather than salsa and, later, rap, which were linked to working class, black and brown communities (Aparicio 1998). While rock music could also rightly be considered a U.S. American cultural import, rock music received relatively little backlash as a cultural imperialist project, particularly compared to rap.

Another columnist, Mateo Mateo (1995), published an essay a few weeks later that also lauded the police raids on record stores. Like Yolanda Rosaly, Mateo argued that underground negatively impacted youth, exposing them to the “*tres desgracias*” [three disgraces]: sex, drugs and violence. Mateo warned that underground comprised a “contagion” among Puerto Rican youth that caused them to engage in immoral and unhealthy activities. In fact, Mateo considered underground’s “sinful” lyrics so contagious that he labeled it “*SIDA del alma de los niños y adolescentes*” [AIDS of the soul for children and adolescents].

Underlying the concerns regarding the moral health of the Puerto Rican population, particularly middle class youth, were questions about preserving the “moral” basis of dominant constructions of racial democracy. In other words, the insertion of underground into Puerto Rican society might cause Puerto Rican youth to affiliate with underground’s diasporic blackness as opposed to the whitened national identity upheld by discourses of racial democracy. In this vein, many of underground’s critics also reproached the Puerto Rican government for insufficiently protecting youth from underground, especially after the judge dismissed the obscenity charges against underground artists and record store owners. Quoting Milton Picón, the president of the advocacy group Morality in the Media, Rosaly claimed that allowing the proliferation of underground recordings, which she considered to encourage drug use and promiscuity among youth, diminished the impact of the government’s anti-drug policies and *Mano Dura*. Mateo Mateo concurred, arguing that he assumed it would be “*suficiente oír esa letra para dar con el mallete en la mesa con santa indignación y declarar culpable a todo el que ha contribuido a crear y propagar ese delito tan contagioso*” [sufficient to listen to these lyrics in order to angrily bring down the mallet on the table and declare guilty everyone who has contributed to creating and propagating this contagious sin]. Shocked that these “obscene” lyrics would not constitute illegality in the eyes of the court, Mateo asked, “*¿Estamos empezando a legislar el asesinato de las conciencias y la inmoralidad?*” [are we starting to legislate the assassination of conscience and immorality?]. By requesting more government intervention and policing of underground, morality critics such as Yolanda Rosaly and Mateo Mateo reproduced racial and class divisions that situated underground and *caseríos* outside of the Puerto Rican national space.

Arguments such as those by Yolanda Rosaly, Mateo Mateo, and others evidenced a moral panic surrounding underground as the music of marginalized black and working class communities that had entered the mainstream (R. Rivera 2009). Ultimately, both the cultural imperialism and morality arguments against underground reiterated the music’s relationship to an abject blackness in an attempt to keep intact hegemonic discourses of racial democracy. Vico C described the backlash against underground as a response to deeper fears about the “ghetto controlling” though the music’s growing popularity among middle and upper class youth. He continued,

Whatever people don’t understand, they criticize. And they go more by racism and classism, what we call *clasismo*, than, being worried because of the kids, because if they will be that worried about their kids, they would be right now supervising whatever their kids are looking at on the internet, you know, or whatever they are listening to, whatever it is. You know, classism, they, *lo disfrazan* [they disguise it], you know, *disfrazan como preocupación social* [they disguise it as a social concern], which its not (Personal Communication, 10 January 2008).

Vico C's comments speak to the ways that underground's critics mobilized discourses of morality to mask the anxieties surrounding the circulation of a new interpretation of the blackness associated with *caseríos* in the Puerto Rican mainstream. As Raquel Z. Rivera (2009) writes, in the debates surrounding underground, "class and racial boundaries were being strictly policed given a discourse that assigned blame and polluting qualities along class and racial lines and reinforced a sharp 'us vs. them' attitude" (126). Both the cultural imperialism and morality arguments worked together in an attempt to maintain the hegemony of discourses of racial democracy. More specifically, these criticisms of underground all portrayed it as an expression of abject blackness and, therefore, distinct from Puerto Rican identity.

Underground artists responded to these criticisms in their songs and in newspaper interviews. Soon after the raids, the *San Juan Star* published an interview with an "up-and-coming" underground group called the Nizze. Although the Nizze's interview took place in the notorious Lloréns Torres housing projects, the group's profile differed somewhat from other underground artists because they attended universities. Still, the members of the group criticized the government for unfairly targeting rappers, arguing that underground expressed "real" life and struggles in the impoverished urban neighborhoods of Puerto Rico (Medina 1995:6). They claimed that morality groups were "hypocrites" who had opinions about *caseríos* without ever having experienced urban life (Medina 1995:7). Similar to Vico C's reflections on the debates surrounding underground, the Nizze's interview highlighted the underlying racism and classism that motivated the attacks against underground.

Other proponents of rap also criticized the "hypocrisy" of government officials and morality groups. Several academics and cultural critics published editorials in newspapers arguing that underground represented the lives of marginalized sectors of Puerto Rican society and therefore should be taken as serious social commentaries rather than glorifications of violence or drug use (R. Rivera 2009:118, 119). Many editorialists countered the morality arguments by maintaining that underground's hypersexual and violent lyrics, while problematic, did not necessarily reflect the everyday lives and activities of the singers who composed them (R. Rivera 2009:118-120). These arguments directly countered the assumption of an inherently "primitive" or "abject" blackness that pervaded some of the morality arguments leveled against underground. Rather, these editorials pointed out the structural issues that caused the marginalization of *caseríos*.

Others argued that rap was in fact a Puerto Rican phenomenon (e.g. see Bernabe 1996; R. Rivera 1992/1993; R. Rivera 1998). In direct response to Edwin Reyes's editorial, Rafael Bernabe published an article entitled, "*Rap: Soy Boricua pa' que tú lo Sepas*" [Rap: I'm Puerto Rican just so you know], also in *Claridad*. Bernabe (1996) accused Reyes of having a racist, elitist interpretation of Puerto Rican national culture whose approach to rap resembled that of a colonizer attempting to control and assimilate the colonized. For example, Bernabe considered Reyes's descriptions of rap as "*monótono, elemental, primitivo, subcultural, subterráneo*" [monotonous, elementary, primitive, subculture, underground] similar to Joseph Conrad's portrayal of Africa as the "Heart of Darkness"; however, rather than locate the "primitive" rap within Africa, Bernabe points out that Reyes locates it within the ghettos of the United States, thus revealing Reyes's classism, racism, and narrow, elitist conceptualization of Puerto Rican national culture. Ultimately, Bernabe asserted that rap's presence in Puerto Rico displayed a need to create more "inclusive" and "dynamic" understandings of Puerto Rican culture that take

into account diverse experiences, including those of both black Puerto Ricans on the island and Nuyoricans in the United States.

Overall, the debates surrounding underground in the mid-1990s illumine the extent to which underground's expressions of a blackness that was intimately connected to other African diasporic sites threatened to disrupt dominant constructions of racial democracy and, in turn, Puerto Rican identity. This is particularly evident considering that, despite underground's circulation in Puerto Rico for several years prior to the mid-1990s, the moral panic surrounding the music did not surface until it entered more mainstream markets on the island. Despite the attempts to censor underground, however, the music continued to contest the assumptions of a "raceless" society in discourses of racial democracy, expressing new understandings of blackness that both responded to local conditions in the *caseríos* and articulated distinct links with other African diasporic groups.

## Conclusion

Ironically, the controversy surrounding underground exposed the music to new audiences. According to DJ Playero, one of the pioneering underground artists, the confiscation of underground recordings provided free publicity that led many artists to realize that they could capitalize on a growing audience. They began producing albums with "clean lyrics" to avoid censorship, and changed their "look" and presentations to appeal to more mainstream audiences (Reyes Avilés 1999a). As underground became more visible, it received sponsorship from television, radio, and record companies who also sought to capitalize on the music's success. By the mid-1990s, underground became more mainstream, and Puerto Ricans referred to it almost exclusively as "reggaetón" (Marshall 2009).

Reggaetón's entrance into the mainstream did not prevent discrimination against rappers and their communities. In a 1999 interview, DJ Playero claimed that, while rappers enjoyed new airplay on television and radio, they still were unfairly attributed with stereotypes associated with drugs, sexuality and violence due to their working class roots (Reyes Avilés 1999b). Ten years later, in my surveys with Puerto Rican youth, 75% stated that discrimination against reggaetón existed in Puerto Rico; several added that stereotypes of reggaetón artists and fans as violent, hypersexual, uneducated and drug abusers persisted in Puerto Rican society. In general, many of the Puerto Rican youth who I interviewed agreed that reggaetón is more accepted in Puerto Rican society than before, but that often rappers and reggaetón fans face discrimination. For example, Ana María, a reggaetón fan and college student, claimed that many Puerto Ricans blamed reggaetón for societal issues because of the music's lyrics even though, in her opinion, reggaetón did not differ much from rock or other forms of music. Moreover, Ana María, who had an internship with the government, stated that youth who wore clothes such as baggy jeans and hairstyles such as cornrows associated with reggaetón would be denied employment there. Likewise, Mari, a hair dresser from the San Juan area, claimed that police targeted reggaetón fans, stating "if you're listening to reggaetón [in your car], say [the police] stop you for whatever reason, when they stop you and you're listening to reggaetón, their whole attitude changes, the way they treat you changes." Fans' everyday experiences with discrimination displays the extent to which the mid-1990s associations between criminality, blackness and underground have been entrenched in Puerto Rican society even after reggaetón's success.

Popular reggaetón artists also described the existence of discrimination against rappers. Reggaetón artist Jowell of the successful duo Jowell y Randy stated, “*Ya poco a poco están integrando los raperos a la sociedad. Es un trabajo que ha costado 20 años a lograr. Aún existe prejuicio, es cierto, pero creo que es algo normal, al igual que pasó con los cocos*”<sup>17</sup> *en los años [19]70s...siempre que sale algo innovador o controversial pues la sociedad como que se resiste un poco al principio*” [Now they are integrating rappers little by little into society. It’s something that has taken us 20 years to do. Even though prejudice exists, its true, I think its something normal, the same that happened to the *cocolos* in the 1970s...whenever something innovative and controversial comes out, well, society resists it a little at first] (Personal Communication, 5 June 2009). While Jowell mitigates the impact of discrimination on rappers by describing it as a “normal thing,” his comments reveal two significant issues related to the position of reggaetón in contemporary Puerto Rican society. First, Jowell’s comparison with salsa via his reference to *cocolos*, or salsa fans from the 1970s and 1980s, positions reggaetón as a fundamentally Puerto Rican cultural practice that is also tied to urban, working class, and predominantly black communities. Although initially salsa was subject to discrimination because of its working class and African diasporic roots (e.g. see Aparicio 1998; J. Flores 2009), it has since become recognized as a “national” music in Puerto Rico. Therefore, the links Jowell draws between salsa and reggaetón imply that reggaetón is slowly becoming more accepted and recognized as a “Puerto Rican” cultural practice by individuals who may have previously dismissed the music. Still, while Jowell describes reggaetón as Puerto Rican, he also recognizes the persistence of discrimination against rappers. This is all the more significant considering that Jowell is several years younger than underground artists and a member of one of the most popular reggaetón groups in contemporary Puerto Rico.<sup>18</sup>

Wayne Marshall (2009) argues that the mainstreaming of reggaetón does not diminish the music’s continued link with blackness and *caseríos*. On the one hand, these links are evident in the persistence of discrimination against reggaetón artists and fans that attribute them with stereotypes associated with abject blackness. On the other, the associations between blackness and reggaetón are also apparent in the ways that reggaetón artists and fans continue to adapt African diasporic resources such as musical aesthetics, hairstyles, and styles of dress to express their own identities. Furthermore, reggaetón’s international commercial success since the 1990s has enabled artists to disseminate these new definitions of blackness to wider audiences. Because reggaetón became more popular than ever, and thus perceived as “threatening” to the hegemony of racial democracy discourses, another large-scale government campaign targeting reggaetón took place in 2002. However, while the raids in 1995 aimed to censor underground completely, the campaign in 2002 sought to accommodate reggaetón’s expressions of blackness into dominant constructions of racial democracy, as I will discuss in the next chapter. Such

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<sup>17</sup> *Cocolos* refers to salsa fans from black and poor neighborhoods during the emergence of salsa on the island in the 1970s (Aparicio 1998; Duany 1984). Similar to rappers in the 1990s, *cocolos* were identified partly because of their affiliations with housing projects and poor urban neighborhoods in addition to their distinctive style; they were also attributed with many of the same stereotypes (e.g. drug use, hypersexuality) associated with rappers (Aparicio 1998).

<sup>18</sup> Jowell y Randy launched their first album, *Casa de Leones*, in 2007 that featured original compositions with other reggaetón artists on the White Lion record label and received a Billboard Award nomination for the album. The duo also released their own album, *Los Más Suelos del Reggaetón* in 2007 and toured internationally promoting the album. In my surveys with Puerto Rican youth, 72 percent of respondents listed Jowell y Randy among the top three most popular reggaetón artists in Puerto Rico.

intense and relatively frequent attempts to censor first underground and then reggaetón ultimately reveal the extent to which Puerto Rican elites perceived reggaetón as potentially disruptive to hegemonic discourses of racial democracy in Puerto Rico. Indeed, reggaetón offers opportunities for Puerto Rican youth to participate in an African diasporic space that enables the construction of new ideas about blackness that call for racial equality in Puerto Rico.



## Chapter Five: “*Bailo reggaetón pero no soy chica fácil*”: Perreo, Respectability and the Specter of Sexuality<sup>1</sup>

In May of 2002, two events concerning the representation of Puerto Rican women dominated the coverage in three of Puerto Rico’s major newspapers, *El Nuevo Día*, *El Vocero*, and *Primera Hora*.<sup>2</sup> The first was the Miss Universe Pageant held in San Juan. Articles regarding the pageant emphasized the beauty queens’ intelligence, career goals, and even quoted the ambassadors of their respective countries regarding their exceptional personal characters (e.g. Fernández Barreto 2002; Heydrich Blanco 2002). Such newspaper coverage portrayed beauty queens as “modern” women who represented the most desirable female characteristics, from their looks (one article even defined women’s “perfect” measurements as 34-24-34, according to the judges of Miss Universe) to their intelligence, morals and family values (Vargas 2002j). While newspapers covered the activities and profiles of beauty pageant contestants from around the world, the two who received the most attention were outgoing-Miss Universe Denise Quiñones from Ponce, Puerto Rico, and 2002 Miss Puerto Rico Universe contestant Isis Casalduc.

Denise Quiñones returned to Puerto Rico to pass her Miss Universe crown onto the winner of the 2002 pageant. Newspapers focused on Denise’s homecoming, which included meetings with politicians like Governor Sila Calderón and San Juan mayor Jorge Santini (Burgos 2002; Vargas 2002k). She participated in various activities throughout the island, such as humanitarian visits to hospitals, shopping in Río Piedras, and lounging at the beach in Isla Verde (López 2002; Marrero-Rodríguez 2002c; Pérez Rivera 2002a). Newspaper profiles of Denise Quiñones detailed her reign as Miss Universe, especially her humanitarian efforts as an AIDS activist, her meetings with other Puerto Rican celebrities, and how Denise felt she had “matured” over the last year (Marrero-Rodríguez 2002d; Vargas 2002d). Denise’s family life also received attention from the press, above all her relationship with her mother, whom the beauty queen described as her role model (Vargas 2002d; Vargas 2002c). The coverage of Denise Quiñones’s Miss Universe reign and her homecoming emphasized family values, altruism, and national pride, portraying Denise as the beloved representative of Puerto Rico.

At the same time, Miss Puerto Rico Universe, Isis Marie Casalduc, who would be competing in the 2002 pageant, also received much coverage in the newspapers. Like with Denise, newspapers focused on Isis’s everyday life, from her preparations for the upcoming pageant to her personal relationships. Articles described the various gowns, hair colors, make-up styles, and even diets that Isis used prior to the pageant (Brugueras 2002a; Brugueras 2002b; Pagán Sánchez 2002). Newspapers concentrated on Isis’s relationships with her mother and her boyfriend of four years (who, along with the Dalai Lama, were her heroes; Ortiz Rivera 2002;

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<sup>1</sup> “*Bailo reggaetón pero no soy chica fácil*” is a lyric from Ivy Queen’s song “*Quiero Bailar*.” It translates to “I dance reggaetón, but I’m not easy.”

<sup>2</sup> *El Nuevo Día* is the largest newspaper in Puerto Rico, reaching 1.2 million readers and circulating about 200,000 copies. The newspaper’s website is also the most viewed website on the island and is read by seven out of ten Puerto Ricans ([www.elnuevodia.com](http://www.elnuevodia.com); [www.grupoferrerangel.com](http://www.grupoferrerangel.com)). *El Vocero* is the second largest newspaper in Puerto Rico with a paid circulation of 136,000 copies ([www.vocero.com](http://www.vocero.com)). *Primera Hora* was created most recently, in the 1990s, and has the fastest growing newspaper on the island with a circulation of about 131,000 copies ([www.grupoferrerangel.com](http://www.grupoferrerangel.com)).

Vargas 2002b). Reporters described Isis's childhood as nurtured by a close-knit, two-parent family that supported their children in all of their endeavors (Vargas 2002b). Like Denise Quiñones, newspapers portrayed Isis Casalduc's image and personal characteristics as ideal Puerto Rican qualities to be admired both on the island and internationally.

Beauty pageant contestants embody idealized national identities on both the local and international stage (Ahmed-Ghosh 2003; Banet-Weiser 1999; Barnes 1997; King-O'Riain 2008). International beauty pageants position representations of diverse national identities alongside one another, providing spaces for formerly colonized (or, in the case of Puerto Rico, colonized) countries to present themselves as equally as "modern" as Western countries through the bodies of their beauty queens (Ahmed-Ghosh 2003; Banet-Weiser 1999:184; Edmonson 2003). Furthermore, the Miss Universe pageant offers the "host country" where the pageant takes place greater opportunity to display its "best" national qualities via the performances and "publicity vignettes" about the country shown on television during the pageant (Banet-Weiser 1999:191). Consequently, the Miss Universe pageant in San Juan provided several opportunities to present Puerto Rican national identity to an international audience, especially the racially mixed-but-white national identity embodied by the *jibaro*. Both Denise Quiñones and Isis Casalduc are considered white in Puerto Rico, and conform to the Eurocentric standards of beauty intrinsic to many international beauty pageants (Banet-Weiser 1999; Barnes 1997; Edmonson 2003; King-O'Riain 2008). Isis's embodiment of Puerto Ricanness was perhaps best exemplified in her *jibara*-inspired outfit that included a peasant blouse and long white skirt, which won second place in the "traditional" costume competition (Vargas and Fernández 2002). In addition, the activities that all of the Miss Universe contestants participated in during the month before the pageant, such as visiting Taíno hieroglyphs and learning to dance plena and salsa, represented the indigenous and African components of constructions of racial democracy in Puerto Rico (Valdivia and Heydrich 2002; Vargas 2002e; Vargas 2002f; Vargas 2002h; Vargas 2002i). Therefore, the Miss Universe pageant reproduced the racially mixed foundations of Puerto Rican identity through pageant activities that acknowledged the African and indigenous branches of racial democracy discourses, but maintained the discourse of racial democracy's Hispanic bias through the white bodies of Denise Quiñones and Isis Casalduc.

In addition to representing national identities for an international audience, beauty pageants simultaneously display idealized national identities for domestic audiences (Banet-Weiser 1999:184). Puerto Rican newspapers' daily descriptions of pageant activities alongside Denise and Isis's profiles conveyed to the island's population ideas about race, gender and Puerto Rican identity. Newspapers presented Denise Quiñones and Isis Casalduc as representatives of the ideal Puerto Rican woman: both came from white, middle class, two-parent households, prioritized "family values" while also aspiring to their own career goals, and took pride in Puerto Rican culture and representing the "best" the island had to offer. Profiles of Isis Casalduc and Denise Quiñones in the media emphasized their "respectability," or virtuous (white) womanhood, and defined it as a trope of Puerto Rican national identity.

However, Denise Quiñones and Isis Casalduc were not the only women making headlines. In May of 2002, Senator Velda González, chairperson of the Special Commission for the Study of Violent and Sexual Content in Puerto Rican Radio and Television, initiated the government's Anti-Pornography Campaign. The Anti-Pornography Campaign aimed to eliminate pornographic content from all media, including radio and television; however,

González and her colleagues specifically targeted reggaetón, which they considered a “vulgar” music with “pornographic” videos that threatened to destroy Puerto Rican society’s values and corrupt middle class youth. Although male artists and producers have always dominated the reggaetón industry, the Anti-Pornography Campaign focused much attention on the predominantly female music video dancers, as well as the impact of videos on young women’s self-esteem and opinions about sexuality. Consequently, alongside the images and analysis of Miss Universe contestants were articles about the Anti-Pornography campaign and profiles of music video dancers.

It is true that reggaetón music videos often portray women in problematic ways. During this time period, the dancers featured in music videos included a variety of racial groups ranging from white to black, although the majority of them were on the whiter end of the racial spectrum.<sup>3</sup> These women were frequently filmed wearing thong underwear, gyrating in front of men or next to poles as if in strip clubs, and sometimes positioned as if they were performing certain sex acts. However, my concern is not with the representations of women in reggaetón music videos as much as it is with the government’s *response* to these videos. As Jillian Báez (2005) argues, although these videos “can rightly be accused of being misogynistic and homophobic, reggaetón should not be considered monolithic” (65). In fact, as these music videos became more controversial, many reggaetón artists publicly opposed the sexual objectification of women in them (Cruz Maisonave 2002; González Rodríguez 2002b). Moreover, not all reggaetón songs even dealt with sex, including other themes like social issues. Besides, other musical genres popular in Puerto Rico, such as salsa and bachata, represented women in similar ways that reinforced heteronormative, patriarchal hierarchies (e.g. Aparicio 1998; Pacini Hernández 1995; Pacini Hernández 1990). So, the question remains, why would reggaetón be targeted in such harsh and extreme ways?

On the surface, the Anti-Pornography Campaign appeared to revolve solely around questions of morality and female sexuality. However, I argue that the Anti-Pornography Campaign used discussions of pornography and respectability to address much deeper anxieties regarding the new entanglements of race, place, class, gender and Puerto Rican identity represented by reggaetón. By 2002, reggaetón had become more mainstream in Puerto Rico, and youth of all socioeconomic classes were involved. Artists performed regularly in nightclubs, and reggaetón album sales began making significant inroads into the Puerto Rican market. Reggaetón had emerged from the “underground,” poised to expand not only within Puerto Rico but also the international market.

Reggaetón had therefore become out of place, moving beyond its emplacement within *caseríos* into the mainstream. Reggaetón threatened the dominant construction of racial democracy in Puerto Rico by inserting new understandings of blackness into the national, racially mixed-but-white Puerto Rican space. As a result, reggaetón represented an ideological challenge to the hegemony of racial democracy discourses in Puerto Rico. Ideology, according to Jean and John Comaroff (1991), expresses the worldview of a particular subordinate group

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<sup>3</sup> This preference for models with fair complexions and European features is a similar issue in other music video genres, including those performed by and marketed to non-white communities. For example, many hip hop videos in the United States reveal a preference for lighter women, including Puerto Ricans and other Latinas as well as African Americans (e.g. see R. Rivera 2003).

that does not necessarily correspond to the hegemony of the dominant group (24). In general, reggaetón lyrics that exposed racist and classist practices in Puerto Rico, and aesthetics that incorporated diasporic resources from hip hop and dancehall expressed an ideology that countered the whitening bias inherent to hegemonic constructions of racial democracy.

Of course, as many scholars have pointed out, hegemony is constantly in flux as hegemonic groups attempt to incorporate or diffuse ideological contestations (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Gramsci 1971; Hall 1996a). The Anti-Pornography Campaign of 2002 thus served as a pedagogical move to address the ideological challenges present in reggaetón and maintain the hegemony of racial democracy discourses. Sexuality, especially black female sexuality, became the medium through which the challenge to discourses of racial democracy was managed. As several scholars have pointed out, sexuality has frequently been constructed as a trope of blackness; consequently, many colonial projects included a commitment to white racial purity, as embodied by white “virtuous” women, to distinguish between colonized and colonizer (e.g. see Alexander 2005; Hammonds 1997; Hintzen 2002; Hintzen 2003; McClintock 1995; Stoler 2002). Within so-called “racial democracy,” intersections of blackness and sexuality in Puerto Rican identity are particularly important. On the one hand, race mixture forms the basis for a distinctly Puerto Rican identity, thus assuming that all Puerto Ricans have a black (usually female) ancestor. At the same time, despite the racially mixed society, blackness also remains relegated to the past, replaced by the Hispanic-oriented Puerto Rican national identity embodied by the whitened *jibaro* figure. In this way, the discourse of racial democracy contradicts itself, relying on blackness as a constitutive element of society while disavowing its contemporary presence.

Within dominant representations of racial democracy, the ascription of different sexualities (e.g. “virginal”, “hypersexual”) works in tandem with racial classifications to rank individuals along a black/white racial spectrum, despite the fact that Puerto Ricans are considered racially mixed (Hintzen 2002). These rankings produce hierarchies that privilege certain entanglements of race, gender, and sexuality over others. In this context, women like Denise Quiñones and Isis Casalduc embody the ideal Puerto Rican women’s “respectable” sexuality, while reggaetón stands for a “hypersexuality” associated with blackness. Respectability signified a female sexuality that conformed to particular gender roles such as maintaining the nuclear family and avoiding overt displays of sexuality (Hammonds 1997; Higginbotham 1993). Hypersexuality, on the other hand, involved stereotypes of black women as promiscuous and immoral (Hammonds 1997).

The insertion of a black “hypersexuality” allegedly expressed in reggaetón into the Puerto Rican mainstream ignited a “moral panic” within Puerto Rican society, illustrated by the debates that took place during the Anti-Pornography Campaign. In particular, the presence of women in reggaetón music videos became especially threatening to the status quo. On the one hand, women involved in reggaetón were sometimes portrayed as victims of a misogynistic, opportunistic, and male-dominated music industry; on the other, female dancers were also considered hypersexual women who did not conform to the “moral” standards of Puerto Rican society. Indeed, these women expressed a certain “erotic autonomy” in their video performances that jeopardized the “respectability” propagated by the state and supposedly embodied by women like Denise Quiñones and Isis Casalduc (Alexander 2005:23). Reggaetón thus became identified as “a social and political problem, a problem that had to be rectified in order to restore a moral

social order” and, concurrently, the hegemony of racial democracy (Carby 1992:740; Hall, *et. al.* 1978). To do so, both government agencies and the media focused intensely on analyzing the affects of reggaetón on Puerto Rican society. In particular, the Anti-Pornography Campaign engaged in a “politics of respectability” that “emphasized reform of individual behavior and attitudes,” particularly for female reggaetón dancers and young Puerto Rican women who watched them (Higginbotham 1993:187).<sup>4</sup>

While attempts to censor underground in the 1990s sought to eliminate the music, reggaetón’s ideological challenge necessitated a different approach that would integrate it into Puerto Rico’s “racial democracy,” thus sustaining the hegemony of racial democracy discourses, and shifting reggaetón from a signifier of blackness to one of Puerto Ricanness. Rather than censorship, González advocated for more “clean” reggaetón lyrics and representations of women in music videos.<sup>5</sup> As Senator González described,

*Lo que pretendo es evitar que sean víctimas de aquéllos que por interés económico, mediocridad e incapacidad para producir buena música y espectáculos de calidad recurran a denigrantes expresiones del género y a la degradación de las mujeres con el único fin de lucrarse a costa de la salud emocional y social de nuestro pueblo. Ya es hora de limpiar el nombre del rap y el reggae y demás géneros musicales y de la juventud que las sigue...Es hora de sacar a los mercaderes de la pornografía y la indecencia de los medios de comunicación tan necesarios para la educación y el sano esparcimiento de nuestro público (qtd. in Vera 2002d)*

[What I am trying to avoid is that [rap and reggaetón] are victims of those who, for economic interests, mediocrity and inability to produce good music and quality presentations, turn to denigrating expressions of the genre [reggaetón] and the degradation of women with the only result of making money at the cost of the emotional and social health of our people. Now it is time to clean up the name of rap and reggae and other musical genres and the youth that follow them...It is time to take out the merchants of pornography and indecency in the media that is so necessary for the education and healthy amusement of our people]

In addition to media representation, Senator González was also concerned with *perreo*, the dance associated with reggaetón. *Perreo* typically involves a female standing back-to-front with a man as she gyrates her hips provocatively against his; the name *perreo* derived from the Spanish word

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<sup>4</sup> Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (1993) argues that this politics of respectability among early twentieth century African American women in the United States centered on reforming individuals’ behavior as part of a broader political project for full incorporation of African Americans into the U.S. While I draw from Higginbotham’s work, it is also important to emphasize that the Anti-Pornography Campaign employed a politics of respectability in order to reinforce, not challenge, the hegemony of racial democracy discourses.

<sup>5</sup> The Anti-Pornography Campaign has similarities with the U.S. trial of rap group 2 Live Crew who were charged with obscenity in the 1990s due to their misogynistic rap lyrics. Kimberlè Williams Crenshaw (1993) argues that while 2 Live Crew did include problematic lyrical and visual representations of black women in their music and videos, the obscenity charges “selectively” focused on 2 Live Crew as opposed to other musicians partly because of racial stereotypes that marked black sexuality as “deviant” in the United States. Moreover, while the court case against 2 Live Crew included concerns about their music videos’ impact on violence against women, Crenshaw (1993) claims that despite the prevalence of black women in the rappers’ music videos, the concern about women’s safety centered on white women instead.

*perro*, or dog, as the dance was assumed to simulate the sexual act between dogs. González not only considered *perreo* inappropriate for television, but also a dangerous dance that led to improper sexual behavior and provoked violent altercations in nightclubs. She argued that reggaetón had a danceable rhythm that “*se puede bailar de otra manera, sin tener que hacer los movimientos obscenos*” [could be danced another way, without having to do obscene movements] (Rodríguez-Burns, 2003c).

To combat the “indecency” of reggaetón and *perreo*, the Anti-Pornography Campaign included multiple Senate hearings regarding the impact of reggaetón on Puerto Rican society. Senators watched reggaetón music videos to assess their pornographic content, and questioned sociologists, social workers and psychiatrists about the potentially disastrous effects of these videos on the moral and psychological health of Puerto Rican youth. Some artists were brought before the Senate to defend their use of certain images in their videos. Ultimately, González and her colleagues recommended a five-part legislation that would regulate pornographic content in the media. Their recommendations were approved by the Puerto Rican Senate on June 14, 2002, and signed into law in August of that year (N. González 2002).<sup>6</sup>

Throughout this process, the activities, concerns, and results of the Anti-Pornography Campaign became the main story reported along with the Miss Universe pageant in Puerto Rico’s three major newspapers, *El Nuevo Día*, *El Vocero*, and *Primera Hora*. Front page headlines like “*Lo que hay detrás de pornovideos*” [What is behind pornographic videos] (*Primera Hora* 5/16/02), “*Atado el Gobierno ante la pornografía: Expertos destacan trabas constitucionales para atacarla*” [The Government inhibited against pornography: Experts detail constitutional obstacles for attacking it] (*El Nuevo Día*, May 16, 2002), and “*Escandaliza el ‘perreo’ a la Legislatura*” [*Perreo* scandalizes the Legislature] (*Primera Hora*, May 15, 2002) surfaced almost daily in the island’s papers. Reporters wrote articles about the hearings in the Senate, exposés on the “real” behind the scenes activities on music video sets, the opinions of individuals in the reggaetón industry, and advice from social workers, educators, and psychiatrists for parents who wanted to “protect” their children from “pornographic” materials. Editorial commentators and the general public published opinion pieces regarding reggaetón’s impact on youth. Accompanying photos featured youth dancing in nightclubs, Senators examining music videos on a large screen, and artists accompanied by scantily clad women in compromising positions.

In this chapter, I focus on media coverage from three of Puerto Rico’s major newspapers (*El Nuevo Día*, *El Vocero*, and *Primera Hora*) to examine how the Anti-Pornography Campaign focused on the trope of black sexuality as a way to secure the hegemony of racial democracy in Puerto Rico. I begin with a more detailed discussion of the ambiguous positioning of black female sexuality as both constitutive of and cast out from Puerto Rican national identity. I then

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<sup>6</sup> The plan included the creation of the Office of the Monitor against Obscenity and Pornography in Media and Communications, under the auspices of the Department of Consumer Affairs, which would educate people on the “dangers of pornography” and how to prevent exposure to youth; established the Citizens’ Bill of Rights Against Obscenity and Pornography that included legal repercussions for the distribution of pornographic content; a law requiring televisions to have a V-Chip that would allow parents to block programs they deemed inappropriate for their children; a law that called for movie theaters and video rental places to inform consumers of pornographic and violent content in movies; and a law prohibiting government agencies from advertising or making any announcements in media outlets that contained pornographic content (Mulero 2002a; N. González 2002).

move to the various discourses used by state actors, cultural critics, reggaetón artists and producers, and music video dancers within the Anti-Pornography Campaign. Government officials involved in the Anti-Pornography Campaign centered on morality and respectability as defining characteristics within discourses of racial democracy, reinscribing certain disciplinary practices that would incorporate some reggaetón within the parameters of Puerto Ricanness and outcast other aspects of reggaetón that could not be accommodated. Some critics of the campaign also reiterated the hegemony of racial democracy, relying not on notions of respectability, but rather descriptions of reggaetón as the latest manifestation of Puerto Rico's African "third root." However, reggaetón artists, producers, dancers, and fans defended the music by expressing an ideology that challenged many of the fundamental tenets of discourses of racial democracy, including the assumption that Puerto Rico was a "raceless" society and that erotic autonomy was divorced from the "respectability" considered intrinsic to Puerto Ricanness. Still, the various arguments put forth by the predominantly male reggaetón artists and producers, and mostly female reggaetón music video dancers, reveals how entanglements of gender, race, and class influenced the ways that different individuals negotiated their positions in relation to the normalizing judgment of racial democracy discourses. Specifically, their arguments underscore reggaetón's ambiguous gender representations. Reggaetón music videos at once destabilized the dominant constructions of "respectability" that underpinned Puerto Rican national identity while at times reproducing stereotypical images of black female sexuality that conformed to stereotypes of abject blackness. Despite this ambiguous position, however, the Anti-Pornography Campaign demonstrates the extent to which reggaetón's insertions of alternative renderings of blackness into Puerto Rican national space were perceived as "threatening" by Puerto Rican elites who sought to maintain the hegemony of racial democracy discourses.

### **"Visibly Invisible": Constructing National Identity through Women's Racialized Bodies**

In her autoethnography about growing up in Puerto Rico and moving to the United States, Maritza Quiñones Rivera (2006) describes being "visibly invisible" as a black woman in Puerto Rico. Writing about her experiences growing up in Carolina, Quiñones Rivera (2006) states, "On the one hand, I am nation. On the other hand, I am race, and erased. The latter is ambiguously silenced, not necessarily by the self but by the eyes of the others" (167-168). Quiñones Rivera is "nation" as a Puerto Rican woman; however, as a black woman, Quiñones Rivera's race actually "erases" her from the nation even though her blackness makes others hyperconscious of her presence, especially with respect to her "always sexually enticing" black female body (Quiñones Rivera 2006; see also Jorge 1986).

The process of making the black female body "visibly invisible" that Maritza Quiñones Rivera describes highlights the ambiguous position of black women in Puerto Rico vis-à-vis discourses of racial democracy. Dominant constructions of racial democracy portray black women as the ancestral mothers of the mixed-but-white Puerto Rican national population. Histories of slavery in Puerto Rico often include a discussion of interracial sexual relationships between Spanish men and Taíno and, especially, African women as the basis for the racially mixed population. For example, in his textbook about Puerto Rican history from the conquest through the sixteenth century, Ricardo Alegría (1971) describes race mixture as the foundation of Puerto Rican society:

From the beginning, the Spaniards mixed racially with the support and encouragement of the crown and the church, marrying the Indian woman in the early years and, in the later years, the African slave woman, thus creating a mixed population which received its language, social, and religious customs and way of being from Spanish culture (157).

Likewise, in his classic text, *Historia de la esclavitud negra en Puerto Rico* (1953), Díaz Soler describes the disproportionate number of Spanish women to men as part of the catalyst that created Puerto Rico's racially mixed population:

*Esas circunstancias, sumadas al hecho de que el español se acopla gustoso con mujeres de otras razas, hizo de la mestización<sup>7</sup> una realidad americana. Al desaparecer el indio de las Antillas, el español encontró en la africana el sustituto para saciar sus apetitos sexuales (225).*

[These circumstances, in addition to the fact that the Spanish were willingly intimate with women of other races, made *mestización* an American reality. When the Indian disappeared from the Antilles, the Spaniard found in the African woman a substitute to satisfy his sexual appetite.]

In accounts such as those by Alegría and Díaz Soler, black women become essential to the development of the Puerto Rican nation (especially considering the presumed “extinction” of Taínos). Despite the depiction of black women as the ancestral mothers of Puerto Rico, their role as foundational to the creation of Puerto Rico has remained historical. Nevertheless, although racial democracy requires black female sexuality to exist, racial democracy discourses also disavow contemporary expressions of blackness, including sexuality, in favor of a Hispanic-biased version of Puerto Rican identity.

Instead, the contemporary preservation of the nation now relies on racially mixed-but-white Puerto Rican women like Denise Quiñones and Isis Casalduc. As scholars like Ann Laura Stoler (2002) and Anne McClintock (1995) have shown, nationalist projects that attempted to unify multiple racial groups within a particular nation-state often relied on the figure of the white woman to embody the nation while at the same time reinforcing racial boundaries through discourses of white female purity. The idea of “protecting” the perceived inherent “virtue” of white women is the cornerstone of many nationalist projects (McClintock 1995; Stoler 2002). In the Caribbean, discourses of hybridity's valorization of whiteness also harbors a desire for “purity,” which, under colonialism, was embodied by white women (Hintzen 2002; Hintzen 2003). As discourses of hybridity like racial democracy took hold, however, “pure” whiteness became unattainable since all individuals were presumed to be racially mixed (Hintzen 2002). Nevertheless, particular tropes that had been associated with “pure” whiteness, including “respectability,” became attributed to dominant constructions of national identities, thus allowing for a simultaneous valorization of whiteness and recognition of racial mixture (Edmonson 2003; Hintzen 2001; D. Thomas 2004). Like other parts of the Caribbean, Puerto Rico has also aligned the trope of respectability with whiteness (Jorge 1986; Quiñones Rivera 2006; Suárez Findlay 1999:22-24).

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<sup>7</sup> Throughout his text, Díaz Soler uses “*mestización*” to mean *mestizaje*.



Entanglements between race and class become one way that non-white Caribbean women can move towards the whiter end of the black-white spectrum within nations defined by discourses of hybridity like racial democracy. In specific circumstances, non-white women of particular socioeconomic class backgrounds might be divorced from stereotypes of black female “hypersexuality,” provided that they conform to ideals of “respectability” represented by whiteness (Carby 1992; Edmonson 2003; Suárez Findlay 1999; Ulysse 1999). Eileen Suárez Findlay (1999) argues that in nineteenth century Puerto Rico, non-white individuals who had a certain socioeconomic class position and a “respectable lifestyle” would also be considered “honorable.” Likewise, white women of lower socioeconomic backgrounds may be considered to have a less “honorable” sexuality that conforms more to the stereotypes of black women. Therefore, as Gina Ulysse (1999) argues regarding divisions between Jamaican “uptown ladies” and “downtown women,” the relative fluidity in racial categories that results from varying entanglements of race, class, and gender positions working class black women as the “sexual deviants” in relation to both white women and upper class, non-white women.

At the time of the Anti-Pornography Campaign, portrayals of black Miss Universe contestants revealed how specific entanglements of class, race, and gender allow select women to claim “respectability.” One third of Miss Universe pageant contestants in 2002 were black, including Miss Colombia Vanessa Mendoza, Miss Honduras Erika Ramírez, and Miss Dominican Republic Ruth Ocumarez (Vargas Rodríguez 2002). Newspaper articles featuring the black beauty queens emphasized their family and educational backgrounds, and, at least for the Afro-Latin American contestants, their pride in representing the black populations of their respective countries (Brugueras 2002c; Brugueras 2002d; Santiago Torres 2002a; Santiago Torres 2002b; Vargas 2002a; Vargas 2002g; Vargas Rodríguez 2002).<sup>8</sup> The profiles of the black beauty contestants followed similar formats as those of other beauty queens, including Denise Quiñones and Isis Casalduc, representing the Afro-Latin American beauty queens as conforming to notions of “respectability” tied to middle class white female sexuality.<sup>9</sup>

Similar to Denise Quiñones and Isis Casalduc, media coverage of the Afro-Latin American beauty queens rendered them distinct from the hypersexual black and brown music video dancers who also dominated the news. The representations of reggaetón music video

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<sup>8</sup> While newspapers frequently celebrated Vanessa Mendoza, Erika Ramírez, and, especially, Ruth Ocumarez for being the first black contestants from their respective countries to enter the Miss Universe pageant, accusations of racism mired the crowning of Miss Puerto Rico Universe for the 2002 competition. Nilda Gisela Santiago, Miss Santa Isabel, claimed that Puerto Rico “*todavía no están preparados para llevar a una mujer de color (al certamen internacional)*” [are not ready to bring a woman of color to the international competition] (qtd. in González Rodríguez and Santiago Torres 2001). Although Santiago, who won second runner up, stated that she could not say for certain that racism ended her chances at winning the crown, she argued that Puerto Rican beauty queens were always “*altas blancas con cabellos oscuros y abultados*” [tall white women with thick, dark hair], and lamented that she could not be the first black woman to represent Puerto Rico in the Miss Universe pageant. Since then, in 2004, Alba Reyes Santos, a black woman from the town of Cidra, represented Puerto Rico in the Miss Universe pageant; as Yeidy Rivero (2005) points out, Reyes Santos’s reign was also subject to many of the same debates regarding the intersections of race, gender, respectability and Puerto Rican identity as were mobilized in 2002.

<sup>9</sup> Susan Banet-Weiser (1999) made similar observations regarding black contestants in the Miss America pageant of the United States, arguing that, typically, African American beauty pageant contestants must not only conform to Eurocentric standards of beauty, but also express characteristics such as “respectability” that usually have been attributed to whiteness in the United States (129). Jean Rahier (1998) also notes that the election of a black Miss Ecuador in 1995 created a “domesticated blackness” that did not disrupt racial hierarchies there.

dancers reiterated stereotypes of black women as “uncontrollable” sexual “deviants” (Jorge 1986; Quiñones Rivera 2006; Suárez Findlay 1999). Perhaps the quintessential stereotype of working class, black and brown female sexuality is provided by Oscar Lewis in his ethnography of Puerto Rican and Nuyorican slums, *La Vida* (1966). Although an American anthropologist, Lewis’s characterization of the working class women in the Ríos family resonates with both U.S. and elite Puerto Rican descriptions of working class communities, especially female sexuality:

The people in this book, like most of the other Puerto Rican slum dwellers I have studied, show a great zest for life, especially for sex...They value acting out more than thinking out, self-expression more than self-constraint, pleasure more than productivity, spending more than saving, personal loyalty more than impersonal justice. They are fun-loving and enjoy parties, dancing and music (Lewis 1966:xxvi).

Lewis (1966) continues by describing the residents of the slum, especially the women, as having an “overwhelming preoccupation with sex” that leads to inappropriate displays of sexuality around their children (xxvii). Moreover, Lewis (1966) portrays many of the working class women as prostitutes whose profession subsequently leads to issues within their families (xxvii).

Oscar Lewis’s description of women in a Puerto Rican shantytown reinforces stereotypical traits associated with working class, black women’s sexuality in Puerto Rico (and, arguably, elsewhere). Working class people are presented as driven by “emotion” rather than “intelligence,” thus perpetuating their condition. Moreover, Lewis’s concentration on sexuality, particularly women’s sexuality, represents them as “immoral” individuals who engage in prostitution and have no sexual boundaries, even enticing their own children. Descriptions such as Lewis’s, especially the emphasis on the extreme hypersexuality and emotional, almost irrational, behavior, represent a sharp departure from the “respectable” sexuality of mixed-but-white Puerto Rican women.

As a result of the prevalence of such stereotypes, working class black and brown Puerto Rican women have become “visible” as racialized and gendered “others” within Puerto Rico. Consequently, working class black women required “surveillance” in order to keep hidden the contradictions inherent to dominant constructions of Puerto Rican racial democracy. As Michel Foucault (1995) argued, surveillance includes constant visibility of individual bodies to ensure that specific rankings or hierarchies of people remain intact (see also Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983:159). With continuous surveillance, individuals must self-discipline themselves to conform to the standards of society’s “normalizing judgment” (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983:158). Inscribed with stereotypes of hypersexuality, black and brown working class women required surveillance so as not to insert black sexuality within the national space of Puerto Rico. As Linda Briggs (2002) writes, “For feminists, nationalists, the U.S. military, the federal government, philanthropists and academic scientists and social scientists, it has been important to ‘know’ Puerto Rican women’s bodies, and to rescue, condemn, or defend working-class women” (15).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> In some instances throughout Puerto Rican history, working class women were literally subject to surveillance. For example, laws regarding prostitution in the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries targeted working class women assumed to be prostitutes who were considered a threat to public health as carriers of venereal disease and to the morality of Puerto Rican society more generally (Briggs 2002:58; Suárez Findlay 1999:88-100, 176-178). While

With reggaetón's emergence out of the emplacement of blackness in *caseríos*, the Anti-Pornography Campaign's efforts to maintain the hegemony of racial democracy discourses centered partly on the surveillance of black women's bodies. Women dancing in music videos became hypervisible in the debates about morality and respectability that permeated the campaign. At the time, media coverage of reggaetón music video dancers routinely depicted them as strippers or prostitutes who did not value education or develop monogamous sexual and close-knit family relationships, solidifying many of the same stereotypes promoted by Oscar Lewis and others in the mid-twentieth century. Furthermore, these stereotypes were distinctly racialized, attributing female dancers with characteristics assumed to represent black female sexuality. In the end, supporters of the Anti-Pornography Campaign including cultural critics, politicians, and Puerto Rican citizens relied on the various entanglements of race, gender, and sexuality to portray reggaetón as a "threat" to the moral and social stability of Puerto Rican society.

***"Tenemos que proteger a la familia puertorriqueña en todos aspectos"***

With reggaetón moving out of place into the national space of Puerto Ricanness, the Anti-Pornography Campaign deployed a discourse about morality to portray reggaetón music videos as a serious threat to the emotional and physical health of Puerto Rican youth, especially girls. Instead of forthright discussions regarding the anxieties about blackness present in the mainstreaming of reggaetón, the Anti-Pornography Campaign supporters relied primarily on constructions of "respectability" and "hypersexuality" that signified Puerto Ricanness and blackness, respectively, to determine how to "clean up" reggaetón, and to predict the potential consequences should reggaetón continue expressing an overt blackness. To accomplish this goal, the Anti-Pornography Campaign consulted "experts" such as sociologists, psychiatrists, and social workers about the dangers of reggaetón. While some argued that parents should be responsible for teaching their children about pornography, the general consensus among Senator González's supporters, including many of these experts, was that complete "protection" of Puerto Rican youth required the participation of several government agencies and individuals. The focus on "protection" from reggaetón fueled the moral panic surrounding the music.

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the specific circumstances of the debates regarding prostitution differed slightly in these two periods, both anti-prostitution campaigns included institutionalization and forced medical inspections of working class women suspected of being prostitutes, whether or not they actually were (Suárez Findlay 1999:91, 178-179). A mid-twentieth century birth control experimentation and forced sterilization campaign that targeted working class women to stem a problem with "overpopulation" revolved around discourses regarding working class women's sexuality and, to a certain extent, a eugenics approach towards race mixture (Briggs 2002). Often, these "public health" campaigns responded to new spatial configurations in Puerto Rico's urban areas. The influx of formerly enslaved Afro-Puerto Ricans that had moved from countryside plantations into Ponce provided some of the impetus for the nineteenth century anti-prostitution campaign there (Suárez Findlay 1999:79-82). Policies to curb overpopulation were developed at the same time that substantial rural migrant populations constructed large shantytowns in Puerto Rico's urban centers during the mid-twentieth century (Briggs 2002; Tyrrell 2008). Once these working class people began moving elsewhere, stereotypes of uncontrolled black female sexuality were brought to the fore as "justification" for policies adversely affecting these communities. Although some of these processes included policies by both U.S. and Puerto Rican officials, discourses used by each country often overlapped, relying on similar stereotypes of black sexuality. As part of this process, stereotypes of abject blackness encompassed black female sexuality and associated it with working class communities.

The protection of Puerto Rican youth and families from the hypersexuality presented in reggaetón music videos became the crux of González's campaign. Several letters to the editor published in the newspapers argued that pornography (often specifying reggaetón music videos) provided a severe impediment to the moral education of Puerto Rico's youth. A few letter-writers expressed that they liked reggaetón and rap, but opposed certain artists' lyrics; however, the majority of letters argued that music videos were an affront to Puerto Ricans. One woman wrote, "*Verdaderamente, es triste que muchas personas se apoyen en el derecho a la libre expresión para demoralizar las mentes de nuestros niños, jóvenes y adultos. Es hora de exaltar los valores que nos dignifican como seres humanos*" [Truthfully, it is sad that many people support the right to free speech in order to demoralize the minds of your children, youth, and adults. It is time to exalt the values that dignify us as human beings] (Rolón 2002). Another called on Puerto Ricans to "*alzar nuestra voz de protesta contra esta degeneración*" [raise our voice in protest against this degeneration], arguing that music videos were "*ofensivos a la dignidad humana*" [offensive to human dignity] (Iriarte 2002). Religious groups such as Pentecostal churches argued that reggaetón music videos could dissolve the unity of the Puerto Rican people, stating "*Estamos viviendo momentos críticos en lo que respecta a la salud moral de nuestro pueblo. El matrimonio y la familia, pilares indiscutibles del edificio social, están siendo socavados y se nos está viniendo abajo toda la estructura con repercusiones impredecibles, pero que amenazan la existencia de nuestra colectividad, de nuestro pueblo*" [We are living in a critical time in terms of the moral health of our people. Marriage and the family, indisputable pillars of our social structure, are being undermined and the entire structure is coming down on us with unprecedented repercussions that threaten the existence of our collectivity, our people] (qtd. in Vera 2002b).

Government officials supporting González's campaign made similar arguments regarding the government's responsibility to protect Puerto Ricans from such "extreme obscenity." Governor Sila M. Calderón stated, "*Me parece positivo que la Legislatura y específicamente la senadora Velda González aborden un tema de trascendencia y preocupación social en Puerto Rico, sobre todo, cuando tenemos que proteger a la familia puertorriqueña en todos aspectos*" [It seems positive to me that Congress and specifically Senator Velda González are tackling a problem of importance and social preoccupation in Puerto Rico, especially, when we have to protect the Puerto Rican family in all aspects] (qtd. in Rosario and Archilla 2002). Implicit within these ideas about responsibility and morality was the perception of a fundamental difference between *caseríos* and the rest of Puerto Rican society. Reggaetón music videos represented the "hypersexuality" of black working class communities, and reiterating the hierarchy inherent to hegemonic depictions of racial democracy that positioned "hypersexual blackness" below "respectable Puerto Ricanness" was one strategy adopted by the government to maintain the boundaries of emplaced blackness that contained it within the *caseríos*.

Besides acknowledging the threat posed by reggaetón, government officials also debated what to do about the problem. Several government agencies came together to support Senator González, including the Office of Youth Affairs, the Office for Drug Control, the Office of Consumer Affairs, and the Office of the Procurator of Women (Garzón Fernández 2002b; Vera 2002d; Vera 2002e). Some government officials took an especially proactive stance to ensure the safe and "clean" production of music videos. Director of the Department of Family Services, Yolanda Zayas argued that reggaetón music videos not only encouraged immoral behavior, but also violated minors' rights (González Rodríguez 2002b; Millán 2002). Zayas claimed that the

Department of Family Services would investigate any music video where it appeared that a minor may have participated, including the mere presence of artists' children on music video sets (González Rodríguez 2002b). The secretary of the Department of Work and Human Resources, Victor Rivera, offered the support of his officers who would intervene at random on music video sets suspected of employing minors; since individuals who participated in videos without pay could not be subject to the regulations of the Department of Work and Human Resources, the Department of Family Services, Department of Justice, and Police would work together to monitor music video sets (Vera 2002f; Millán 2002). While officials from many of these agencies cautioned that González's measures must not defy rights to free speech, they all generally agreed that pornography, and reggaetón music videos in particular, posed a threat to the morality of society, and thus required intense surveillance and intervention from government officials.

Included in the arguments concerning protection and morality was the question of the exact affects reggaetón had on Puerto Rican (middle class) youth. Senator González contended that reggaetón promoted drug use, violence, and sexual promiscuity (Garzón Fernández 2002a; Vera 2002a). Many supporters concurred. Psychologist Mercedes Rodríguez testified before the Senate that all violence is "interconnected," and the use of minors in music videos could be considered a form of violence, as well, implying that youth's exposure to reggaetón could lead them to commit other forms of "violence." Moreover, Dr. Rodríguez stated that *perreo* degraded all human beings who participated in it, not just women (Morales Blanes 2002a). Social worker Sally López affirmed in a newspaper article that, "*Lamentablemente, el acceso a material pornográfico puede tener efectos nocivos a largo plazo. Los niños expuestos pueden imitar conductas inadecuadas que en muchas ocasiones son agresivos*" [Unfortunately, access to pornographic material can have harmful, long-term effects. Exposed children can imitate inappropriate conduct that is often aggressive] (qtd. in Mulero 2002b). Letters to the editor emphasized that reggaetón music videos would negatively influence girls' self-esteem by encouraging them to measure their self-worth in terms of sexuality, and send young boys the message that violence against women is acceptable (Cruz 2002; Torres 2002). In general, most experts and government officials considered *perreo* a severe impediment to the healthy and "normal" development of Puerto Rican youth.

During the Anti-Pornography Campaign, few newspaper articles detailed the actual activities of reggaetón fans<sup>11</sup>; however, one incident garnered attention. On May 27, 2002, a group of teen-agers stopped one hundred kilometers of traffic along Highway 2 in Aguadilla to protest the Anti-Pornography Campaign. Although protest organizers had previously assured the transit authorities that they would not cause "disorder" in public, passers-by reported that protesters shouted obscenities and made provocative gestures at them. One witness described the scene: "*Había jóvenes sobre las capotas de los carros, hablando palabras soeces. Había jovencitas que se quitaron el sostén y se tiraban cerveza por encima del suéter*" [There were youth on the tops of cars, yelling vulgar words. There were young girls who took off their bras and poured beer on their sweaters] (qtd. in Nieves Ramírez 2002). The radio operator for the transit authorities, Norberto Esteves, also stated, "*Estaban fuera de control, muchos estaban borrachos y las damas en posiciones bastantes feas. Algunas se bajaron la parte de abajo de los*

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<sup>11</sup> In later years, though, frequent newspaper exposés about reggaetón fans appeared, as I will explain later.

*trajes de baño*” [They were out of control, many were drunk, and the women in very ugly positions. Some women lowered the bottom half of their bathing suits] (qtd. in Nieves Ramírez 2002). In the end, once transit authorities arrived at the scene, protesters fled without causing any accidents or damage; however, their behavior represented exactly the kinds of problems that supporters of the Anti-Pornography Campaign claimed reggaetón would foment. The sexual exhibitionism, alcohol use, and vandalism described by witnesses of the protest exemplified the potential affects that experts had testified could result if youth listened to reggaetón.

Instilling “good” morals and protecting youth from “bad” pornography thus became paramount to the Anti-Pornography Campaign. The Anti-Pornography Campaign expressed anxiety that youth, especially girls, would absorb the behaviors and characteristics of the women involved in *perreo*. Throughout the campaign, respectability was framed as a fundamentally Puerto Rican quality represented by women like Denise Quiñones and Isis Casalduc, as opposed to the hypersexual “immorality” of reggaetón. Still, because of reggaetón’s mainstream popularity, not all reggaetón could be eliminated. Rather, certain reggaetón could be incorporated into Puerto Ricanness provided that artists “cleaned up” their lyrics and music video representations to become more “respectable.” Consequently, Senator González and supporters of the Anti-Pornography Campaign reinscribed the hierarchies inherent to discourses of racial democracy that positioned black female sexuality below respectable whiteness. In this way, the Anti-Pornography Campaign portrayed particular female dancers as “inauthentically” Puerto Rican, erased from the nation, because they did not ascribe to ideals of respectability; however, some critics of the campaign proposed another framework that interpreted reggaetón’s sexuality as a characteristic that could be easily integrated into discourses of racial democracy, albeit in problematic ways.

### ***“La bomba fue el rap de hoy”***

While some supporters of the Anti-Pornography Campaign attempted to resolve the perceived threat of reggaetón by casting certain artists out of Puerto Rican national space, some critics of the campaign argued that constructions of racial democracy included a space for reggaetón to be integrated into Puerto Ricanness as a “black” cultural practice. As a result, older arguments regarding reggaetón’s Puerto Ricanness resurfaced during the Anti-Pornography Campaign; however, rather than the charges of “cultural imperialism” (see Chapter Four) that appeared previously (although there were a few during this time), some critics of Velda González’s campaign attempted to *emphasize* reggaetón’s Puerto Ricanness. These arguments described reggaetón’s blackness as an offshoot of the folkloric blackness of bomba and other Afro-Puerto Rican cultural practices, which in turn could be used as evidence of *perreo*’s Puerto Rican qualities. Despite their claims that reggaetón was fundamentally “Puerto Rican,” these arguments shared with the Anti-Pornography Campaign a focus on maintaining the racial hierarchies inherent to dominant discourses of Puerto Rican racial democracy through a perpetuation of the rankings of individuals along a black-white spectrum within Puerto Rican society.

On May 16, 2002, *Primera Hora* included an article entitled “*La bomba fue el rap de hoy*” [Bomba was the rap of today]. The article began,

*Los puertorriqueños llevan el ritmo en la sangre... [sic] y también la sensualidad. Desde los primeros días de la conquista, los 'isleños' se entregaron a los bailes con una pasión pocas veces igualada y, desde entonces, el baile ha sido una vía para representar la gracia y el ritmo sensual de los latinos.*

*La mayoría de los bailes en Puerto Rico surgieron en las barriadas y no en los grandes salones de la alta aristocracia. Por su carácter populachero y, muchas veces, connotaciones eróticas, fueron criticados y prohibidos por los gobiernos de turno (Vásquez 2002).*

[Puerto Ricans have rhythm in their blood...and sensuality, too. Since the first days of the conquest, the 'islanders' gave into the dances with a passion not matched [elsewhere] and, since then, dance has been one way to represent the gracefulness and sensual rhythm of Latinos.

The majority of the dances in Puerto Rico began in the poor neighborhoods and not in the large salons of the aristocrats. Because of their popular character and, many times, erotic connotations, they were criticized and prohibited by the governments of the time]

Reporter Nieve Vásquez then described bomba as one such dance, interviewing Modesto Cepeda, the son of Puerto Rico's "patriarch" of bomba, Rafael Cepeda, about government bans on bomba in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Cepeda also mentioned that the now national folkloric music historically included lyrics considered "erotic" and inappropriate by many elites. Next to the article, a dialogue box featured a drawing of a faceless white couple, the man seductively dipping a woman wearing a tight dress with a long slit. The box described three other Latin American dances previously criticized for erotic content, including merengue, tango, and the lambada, stating, "*Cierto o no, el hecho es que en muchos bailes las connotaciones sensuales se hacen claramente evidentes*" [True or not, the fact is that in many dances, sexual connotations are clearly evident].

Although writer Nieve Vásquez does not explicitly mention *perreo*, the article presented a genealogy that situated *perreo* as the most recent manifestation of "sensual" dances in Puerto Rico and Latin America more generally. Shared histories of emergence out of marginalized communities and persecution by authorities insinuated connections between bomba and plena, and reggaetón. Sexuality (referred to via the tropes of "sensuality" and "passion") and place (specifically "poor neighborhoods") became signifiers of an unspoken blackness that linked these musical practices together. Implicit in the determination of these connections was a critique of González's campaign, for if *perreo* was just the latest manifestation of national folklore, then the sexuality associated with the dance could not be especially threatening. Instead, sexuality associated with these "black" cultural practices was considered simply one aspect of Puerto Rico's "inheritance" from the African "root" of so-called racial democracy.

Through implying that *perreo* was the latest manifestation of Puerto Rico's African ancestry, the article also draws on the ranking of individuals inherent to racial democracy discourses. Because the premise of discourses of racial democracy assumed that all Puerto Ricans were racially mixed with Spanish, African and indigenous ancestry, it followed that certain cultural practices and groups of people would occupy a ranking on the more "African"

side of the black-white spectrum; as Percy Hintzen (2002) argues with respect to creolization, “The combination of racial and cultural hybridity determines location between the [black and white] extremes” (478).<sup>12</sup> *Perreo*, like *bomba*, was therefore evidence of a Puerto Rican cultural practice that existed on the more “African” end of the black-white spectrum in racial democracy. As a result, although *perreo* might not be completely “respectable,” these arguments claimed that it also could not be especially “threatening” because the sexuality present in *perreo* correlated with a particular segment of the population that already was “polluted” by more “African” ancestry than the rest of Puerto Rico (Hintzen 2002:476). Such critics posited that the Anti-Pornography Campaign should focus primarily on effectively managing such overt expressions of blackness.

In her critique of González’s campaign, one writer for *Primera Hora*, Adria Cruz (2002), argued that the Anti-Pornography Campaign did not address the major problem of women’s low self-esteem that perpetuated their representations in music videos. Cruz claimed that girls participating in reggaetón music videos sought to replace feelings of unworthiness and lack of love by seeking attention in music videos that ultimately degraded them. Sexuality and race become intimately tied together as Cruz distinguished between sensual dances and sexual ones that influenced girls’ self-esteem: “*No se trata simplemente de un baile sensual, ni siquiera sexual. Sensual es el tango, sexual es la bomba*” [*Perreo* does not try to be a sensual dance, but rather a sexual one. Tango is sensual, bomba is sexual].

Cruz’s descriptions of *bomba* and tango draw on racialized signifiers to confirm connections between sexuality and blackness. Argentinean tango brings to mind a white couple dressed elegantly and dancing in subtle yet suggestive ways; on the other hand, *bomba*’s position as a metonym for blackness in Puerto Rico alludes to a virulent sexuality exhibited in *bomba*’s dance movements that center on the hips and buttocks. For Cruz, *bomba* and *perreo* share a black hypersexuality that does not correspond to the respectability of Puerto Rican society. Nonetheless, although Cruz considered the sexuality of *perreo* to be a serious issue, she opposed moves to prohibit dancing, arguing that this would cause further problems. Instead, she encouraged the establishment of programs to teach self-esteem and “positive” love relationships to young girls. To that end, Cruz implied that *bomba* and *perreo*, and blackness in general, were permanent fixtures in Puerto Rican society that could never really be removed. Following this argument, the specter of black sexuality is omnipresent in Puerto Rico because of Puerto Ricans’ African heritage. Cruz thus described *perreo* as an inevitable consequence of inherited blackness that must be managed so as not to harm the self-esteem of the Puerto Rican population, and, by extension, threaten the hegemony of racial democracy discourses. Consequently, Adria Cruz attempted to fortify the black-white spectrum in racial democracy, for while she maintained that reggaetón was an aspect of Puerto Rican society, she also positioned it below the “respectable” and whitened Puerto Rican national culture.

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<sup>12</sup> I agree with Shalini Puri (2004) that the various discourses of hybridity, such as creolization or racial democracy, throughout the Caribbean must be analyzed in their specific geographical, social, and historical contexts. Nevertheless, as Shalini Puri (2004) also shows, these discourses of hybridity share many commonalities, including establishing a racial hierarchy that positions European culture and whiteness at the top. Therefore, I contend that arguments such as Percy Hintzen’s (2002) work on ideas of “purity” and “pollution” in creolization are applicable to racial democracy discourses as well.



Cultural critic and acclaimed author Ana Lydia Vega (2002) also provided a serious critique of the Anti-Pornography Campaign. Vega pointed out that, historically, Puerto Rican dances had always been sensual:

*Los bailes criollos han sabido siempre consagrar el protagonismo absoluto del trasero, ese ídolo indiscutible del erotismo antillano. Desde los zafios esguíncos nalgatorios de nuestras célebres rumberas hasta los modestos amagos caderísticos de nuestras estrellas globalizadas, el remeneo sensual sigue siendo una de las claves esenciales del danzar boricua. Asombra, por lo tanto, el furor moralista que han desatado las más recientes manifestaciones de esa tendencia ancestral. ¡Ni que hubieran regresado a los tiempos del interdicto eclesiástico de los bembés de los esclavos!*

[Our *criollo* dances have always been known to consecrate the leading role of the backside, that indisputable idol of Antillean eroticism. From the uncouth swerves of the buttocks of our celebrated *rumberas* to the modest, small hip moves of our global stars, sensual hip-shaking continues to be one of the essential key factors of Puerto Rican dance. How astonishing, therefore, the moralistic rage that has been unleashed at the latest manifestation of this ancestral tendency. As though they had returned to the times of ecclesiastical prohibition of the *bembés* of the slaves!]

*Bembés* were gatherings where people danced bomba in the nineteenth century; concerns that *bembés* could be opportunities for the organization of potential slave revolts combined with general portrayals of bomba as “immoral” led to attempts to ban the music and gatherings where it was played (Vásquez 2002). In comparing the Anti-Pornography Campaign to the prohibition of *bembés*, Vega portrays González and her supporters as absurdly moving back to the times of slavery. Vega implies a racial component of the Anti-Pornography Campaign, pointing out that not only did González and her supporters rely on irrelevant concerns regarding morality to “justify” their campaign, but also unfairly targeted predominantly non-white communities.

Vega emphasizes this point by arguing that the Anti-Pornography Campaign erroneously blames many societal ills on these communities. Although she described reggaetón as “*el lado oscuro de nuestras realidades*” [the dark side of our reality], Vega does not relegate this “dark side” to questions of morality, but also includes socioeconomic problems that disproportionately affect poor communities. She writes,

*La pobreza, la desigualdad y la adicción no fueron inventadas por los raperos. El maltrato crónico embota la sensibilidad. La educación mediocre estrangula la imaginación. Carencias tan profundas no se despacharán con cursos para la enseñanza de ‘valores.’*

[Poverty, inequality, and drug addiction were not invented by rappers. Chronic abuse dulls the senses. Mediocre education strangles the imagination. Such deep deficiencies do not get settled with courses that teach ‘values’.]

Vega therefore chastises the Anti-Pornography Campaign for ignoring the structural issues that impact the *caseríos* and other working class communities. However, rather than advocate for a systemic approach to eradicating such inequalities, Vega proposes a solution that concentrates on individual behavior. Similar to Adria Cruz’s (2002) suggestion for better social programs for

young girls, Vega claims that providing new opportunities for youth to channel their energy into other artistic pursuits would more effectively diminish the impact of reggaetón music videos on Puerto Rican society.

Despite these critiques of the Anti-Pornography Campaign, Ana Lydia Vega suggests a commitment to racial democracy in her descriptions of Puerto Rican dance. This is particularly evident in her discussion of “sensual hip-shaking” as a central component of Puerto Rican dance. Like the article by Nieve Pérez (2002), Vega creates a history of Puerto Rican dance that considered not only bomba (referenced in the *bembés*), but also salsa (evident in the description of “*rumberas*”) as the predecessors of *perreo*. As I have described elsewhere in this dissertation, bomba and salsa (especially in its beginnings) are associated with working class black communities.<sup>13</sup> Consistent with dominant constructions of racial democracy, Vega integrates these dances, and by extension their affiliated blackness, into Puerto Rican national identity. This is particularly evident when she describes Puerto Ricans’ “ancestral tendency” for “hip-shaking” that is even demonstrated in the “modest, small hip moves of our global stars.”<sup>14</sup> Vega’s descriptions that all Puerto Ricans, regardless of their own racial background, participate in this “ancestral tendency” complies with racial democracy discourses’ overarching assumptions that blackness has contributed a particular “musicality” to Puerto Rican identity.

At issue, then, was not *perreo* itself, but where Puerto Ricans were located on the “black-white” spectrum of so-called racial democracy. Vega’s descriptions of dances in Puerto Rico positioned dancers with “uncouth swerves of the buttocks” (i.e. bomba, salsa, *perreo*, and other black-identified dances) on the “African” side of the spectrum. As a result, Vega considers the Anti-Pornography Campaign to be misguided in its emphasis on *perreo* since the dance was simply the latest manifestation of the blackness that already formed part of Puerto Rican identity. Vega’s proposed solution of changing individual behavior rather than structural issues reiterates the importance of self-discipline in maintaining the “respectability” that undergirds dominant constructions of Puerto Rican identity.

Although Adria Cruz, Ana Lydia Vega, and others criticized the Anti-Pornography Campaign, they ultimately depicted *perreo* in a way that also continued the hegemony of elite depictions of racial democracy. Their arguments established histories of Puerto Rican dance that linked bomba to *perreo* through allusions to black sexuality. Like the supporters of the Anti-Pornography Campaign, these arguments reinforced racial hierarchies that depreciated blackness

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<sup>13</sup> I describe this point in greater detail in Chapter Six.

<sup>14</sup> This statement brings to mind the career of Ricky Martin, which was in full swing by 2002. During this time, Martin gained tremendous international fame as a pop singer (assisted by his earlier career as one member of the popular boy band Menudo), and notoriety as a skilled hip-shaker whose reputation was perhaps rivaled only by that of Elvis (Negrón-Muntaner 2004:251). Ricky Martin hails from a middle class *urbanización*, and, according to Frances Negrón-Muntaner (2004), made visible the white middle class Puerto Rican (or “*blanquito*”) community to a global audience. Ricky Martin’s hip-shaking moves thrust him into international stardom, and in some cases, reified stereotypes of Latino men in the United States as hypersexual “Latin lovers”; however, within a Puerto Rican context, Ricky Martin’s dance could be read as an affirmation of discourses of racial democracy.<sup>14</sup> In other words, Martin’s white body has become infused with the “ancestral tendency” to shake his hips because of the African ancestry he automatically has as a member of the racially mixed-but-white Puerto Rican population. As Frances Negrón-Muntaner (2004) writes, “as a white Puerto Rican of middle-class origins, Ricky incorporates black rhythms in a way that already exhibits a certain degree of restraint, symptomatic of the adoption of these styles by upwardly mobile social classes” (256).

and valorized whiteness. As a result, while these critics admonished Velda González and her supporters, they reiterated many of the fundamental tenets of dominant constructions of racial democracy, including the dichotomy between “hypersexual blackness” and “respectable Puerto Ricanness.”

### **“Siempre nos discriminan”: Artists Talk Back**

Still, other criticisms of the Anti-Pornography Campaign, mostly from reggaetón artists and producers, represented a break from racial democracy. Reggaetón is a predominantly male industry, with few female singers and executives. Therefore, many of the opinions that reggaetón industry members expressed in media coverage about the Anti-Pornography Campaign came from men. The response by male artists and industry executives often included a critique of racist and classist practices that impact the *caseríos*. These arguments depicted *caseríos* not as places of inherently “abject” blackness, but rather as places constrained by discriminatory policies that ultimately created few economic opportunities for *caserío* residents. Male reggaetón artists and producers (as well as other critics of the Anti-Pornography Campaign) relayed an ideological critique of dominant discourses of racial democracy, in particular the claims that Puerto Rico was a raceless society.

Much criticism of González’s campaign centered on whether or not the government should take on the issue of pornography in the media. These arguments questioned the morality and the suitability of the campaign. In terms of morality, critics of the Anti-Pornography Campaign pointed to corruption in the government as evidence of the legislators’ inability to serve as appropriate judges of morality. One individual wrote in a letter to *El Nuevo Día* that government corruption in Puerto Rico precluded any politicians from the ability to legislate regarding issues of obscenity, since “*ni todo lo indecente se muestre sin ropa*” [not all indecent things are revealed without clothing] (Garay 2002). Not only were government officials accused of being immoral, but also inappropriate. Some critics argued that González’s legislation directly violated first amendment rights to freedom of speech, and provided a dangerous precedent for the future (one that for some also perpetuated the colonial relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States; Arrieta Vilá 2002; Cotto 2002). Others argued that González’s targeting of reggaetón did not adequately address the much deeper and, to them, more serious issues of women’s rights and representations more generally (Cruz 2002; Vicente 2002). Several people pointed out that other problems, including unemployment, education, and budgetary issues, proved much more detrimental to Puerto Rican society than *perreo* (Casiano 2002; Pérez Ramírez 2002).

The other general argument levied by many critics of the campaign emerged from new entanglements of race, place, and class. Rather than promote the idea that intrinsic immorality characterized *caseríos* and their residents, critics instead portrayed the government as immoral because officials ignored the unfavorable economic conditions in poor urban communities. Several letters to the editor contended that reggaetón lyrics represented the “reality” of a “marginalized” sector of the population. One wrote, “*Me pregunto, cuántas personas pensarán que esta legislación, más allá de marginalizar sectores de nuestra sociedad, tendrá algún otro efecto*” [I wonder, if people will think that this legislation, besides marginalizing sectors of our society, will have any other effect] (Casiano 2002). Another letter-writer stated, “*el género*

*musical nace en la realidad social de un sector de nuestra cultura. No se puede actuar como si esa realidad no existiera*” [this musical genre was born out of the social reality of a sector of our culture. You can’t act like this reality does not exist] (Meléndez Juarbe 2002).

Many reggaetón singers used similar arguments in their criticisms of the campaign, claiming that their songs reflected “real life,” everyday struggles in the *caseríos* that government officials tended to ignore. According to these reggaetón artists and producers, stereotypes of black, working class *caserío* residents isolated them and prevented other opportunities for economic advancement. At the same time, these entanglements of race, place, class, and gender develop criteria of “authenticity” in reggaetón, which, for these male artists, entailed experiences of urban poverty, violence, and being from “the street” (Dinzey Flores 2008b). Artist Polaco argued, “*El hecho es que somos del barrio y eso es lo que vemos y lo que escuchamos*” [The fact is that we are from the *barrio* and this is what we see and what we hear] (qtd. in Mulero 2002c). Reggaetón artist Mickey Perfecto described reggaetón as a “*válvula de escape a los problemas*” [escape valve from problems] (qtd. in González Rodríguez 2002b). He advocated for more education (both “academic” and “sexual”) for poor Puerto Rican youth, and for government officials to work more closely with people from the “streets, public residences, and schools” (González Rodríguez 2002b). On the one hand, these arguments take certain stereotypical characteristics (e.g. violence) as “true” representations of the *caseríos*; however, the associations of such characteristics with *caseríos* were not attributed to an innate immoral quality in *caserío* residents, but instead to inadequate services and discriminatory policies on the part of the government.

Socioeconomic issues in the *caserío* extended to another frequent argument made by reggaetón singers: that music was one of very few options to move out of poverty and the *caserío*. Mickey Perfecto described typical reggaetón singers as “*muchachos que han luchado por salir de los barrios, el dinero que reciben de la música y de los videos es para sus padres y familia para sacarlos adelante*” [young men who have fought to leave the *barrios*, the money they receive from music and videos is for their parents and family so they can take them out of the *barrio* in the future] (qtd. in González Rodríguez 2002b). Record producer Buddha stated, “*Si eres pelotero y llegas a las grandes ligas, sales de la pobreza. Si eres raperero, sales de la pobreza*” [If you are a baseball player and make it to the major leagues, you get out of poverty. If you are a rapper, you get out of poverty] (qtd. in Marrero-Rodríguez 2002b). These arguments insinuated a critique of the government’s lack of resources for *caserío* residents, making reggaetón an important avenue for economic advancement.

Furthermore, some artists directly charged that the Anti-Pornography Campaign was motivated by discrimination against *caseríos* and their residents. Several reggaetón artists pointed out that the representations of women in their music videos did not differ dramatically from those by other celebrated artists like salsa singers Marc Anthony and Celia Cruz, and pop icon Ricky Martin (Cruz Maisonave 2002; Mulero 2002c). The president of a music video television station argued that the Anti-Pornography Campaign specifically singled out, and discriminated against, reggaetón rather than encompass all aspects of the media, as Senator González claimed to do (Morales Blanes 2002b). Music video producer Héctor “El Flaco” Figueroa asserted that prejudice clearly motivated the Anti-Pornography Campaign, stating “*Por más que traten de disfrazarlo es un prejuicio contra la música de raperos*” [Even though they try to hide it, it is prejudice against rap] (qtd. in Mulero 2002b). However, like other artists and

producers, Figueroa emphasized that the discrimination against rap was “nothing new” (Pérez Rivera 2002b). Though not explicitly stated, these accusations that Velda González and her supporters discriminated against reggaetón were intimately tied to questions of race and national identity. Artists implied that, just as *caseríos* had been marked as distinctive places that did not fit into the rest of the more modern Puerto Rican nation, so had reggaetón been targeted as a non-Puerto Rican cultural practice due to its genesis in *caseríos*. Through these charges of discrimination, reggaetón artists revealed the inconsistencies within discourses of racial democracy, especially the persistence of racial discrimination with the assumption that Puerto Rico was a racially harmonious society.

Of course, despite artists’ emphasis on discrimination and economics, the specter of sexuality loomed over them. The Anti-Pornography Campaign focused primarily on women’s sexuality, and occasionally presented female dancers as the victims of the reggaetón industry. Thus, media coverage addressed male sexuality, usually in relation to violence, but did not place much emphasis on it. However, many reggaetón artists and producers responded to accusations that they were misogynistic and exploited women by once again presenting the *caseríos* as isolated and disadvantaged places. Several artists attempted to distinguish themselves from the images of violent hypermasculinity by publicly opposing the exploitation of women in music videos (Cruz Maisonave 2002; González Rodríguez 2002b). Moreover, many pointed out that most women who participated in music videos did so voluntarily (and minors with parental permission), so they could not be considered “exploited” people. Music video producer Héctor Figueroa added that these women were not paid for their work because dancing in videos increased their self-esteem. In fact, Figueroa argued that, like with male artists, reggaetón provided an opportunity for these women to move out of poverty: “*Muchas de ellas, después de trabajar en stripper clubs con identificación falsa, porque también son menores, y de salir en los videos, se sienten artistas, dejan el club, y hasta se casan y rehacen su vida*” [Many of the girls, after working in strip clubs with false identification, because there are also minors there, and after appearing in videos, they feel like artists, leave the club, and even get married and start their lives over] (qtd. in González Rodríguez 2002a).

Figueroa thus positions himself and other reggaetón industry executives as supposed “rescuers” who offer women the opportunity for self-improvement. However, in doing so, Figueroa problematically reiterates the same distinctions between “respectable” and “hypersexual” women as proponents of the Anti-Pornography Campaign. Because they provide opportunities for economic advancement and improved self-esteem, Figueroa describes reggaetón artists and producers as moral agents who offer means for working class women to arrive at certain standards of respectability (e.g. marriage) otherwise unavailable to them. Figueroa’s arguments thus assume that the women who dance in reggaetón music videos cannot achieve the ideals of respectability until they are married and “start their lives over.” Not only does this description differentiate these music video dancers from “respectable” women, but Figueroa also implies that this distinction “justifies” the lack of monetary compensation for their labor. Such arguments comply with historically prevalent depictions of black female sexuality as readily available, commodifiable, and exploitable (Hammonds 1997; Collins 2000).

On the one hand, the criticisms of the Anti-Pornography Campaign as a discriminatory policy taken up by artists and industry executives threatened the salience of dominant discourses of racial democracy, for not only were reggaetón artists and dancers moving beyond the confines

of the emplaced blackness of *caseríos*, but they were also exposing the contradictions inherent to these discourses in their forthright discussions of racism and classism. The fact was that the original assumption that *caserío* residents would be able to move into more middle class areas had still not happened, and artists' criticisms of the education system, high unemployment rates, and the government's neglect to respond adequately to crime and abuse in their communities revealed that the government, not *caserío* residents or reggaetón, perpetuated these conditions. Consequently, accusations that the Anti-Pornography Campaign discriminated against reggaetón provided an ideological critique that exposed some of the racial and class-based discriminatory practices that co-exist with Puerto Rico's so-called racial democracy. Still, the gendered dynamics of their arguments reveal the limits of male reggaetón artists' and producers' criticisms of the Anti-Pornography Campaign. While they challenged some aspects of discourses of racial democracy, many of these male artists, producers, and executives also problematically maintained the distinctions between respectability and hypersexuality that cast black female sexuality out of dominant definitions of Puerto Ricanness. Media coverage of the women involved in reggaetón also emphasized these women's presumed hypersexuality, making male reggaetón artists and producers the proponents of most of the ideological criticism against hegemonic discourses of racial democracy.

### ***“No Estoy Haciendo Nada Mal”*: Women, Perreo and Pathological Sex**

On May 17, 2002, the Puerto Rican newspaper *Primera Hora* released a headline that claimed *“Por uso indiscriminado de menores de edad Gobierno meten mano a pornovideos. Departamento de Familia paraliza emisión de un videoclip que utilizó a dos nenas bajo su custodia”* [For indiscriminate use of minors Government puts a hand against Pornographic Videos. Department of Family Services Stops the Showing of a Video that Used Two Girls under its Custody]. The newspaper then continued with an article called *“Niña en custodia del DF huye y sale en un video”* [Girl in Custody of DF Runs Away and Appears in a Video], charging that Héctor Figueroa and his staff knowingly included a scene with a minor girl dancing in a bikini, water streaming from the shower above, in a Wisin y Yandel music video. The girl, who the newspaper called “Cristal,” allegedly escaped from custody of the Department of Family Services one year earlier, met with Figueroa, and subsequently appeared in reggaetón videos (González Rodríguez 2002c). Yolanda Zayas, secretary of the Department of Family Services, called for the prohibition of minors in all music videos, arguing that this often promoted child pornography. Music video producer Figueroa, on the other hand, argued that Cristal had signed a release form and provided identification that declared she was of age, so he did not know she was a minor. Furthermore, following his accusations that the government neglected to deal with “real” societal issues, Figueroa claimed that in this case, the generally “ineffective” Department of Family Services unfairly targeted his music video to appear as if *“están haciendo algo para la juventud”* [they are doing something for youth]. For her part, Cristal met with reporters to say “on the record” that she was not a minor.

While Cristal's age and alleged status as a ward of the state made her story unique, Puerto Rican newspapers frequently portrayed women in music videos as having similar backgrounds—that is, having grown up in an impoverished area, usually by a single mother, with limited educational opportunities and without proper “love” or “care.” As one typical biography published in *Primera Hora* described, *“La historia es repetitiva. Una chica de padres*

*divorciados, falta de cariño, de atención, de ser escuchada y reconocida. De pronto conoce a un productor que le ofrece lanzarla al estrellato. ¿Cómo? Perreando*” [The story is repetitive. A girl of divorced parents, without love, attention, being heard or recognized. Suddenly, she meets a producer who offers to launch her into stardom. How? *Perreando*] (González Rodríguez 2002b). The women of reggaetón videos were thus frequently presented as daughters of working class, Puerto Rican single mothers, who saw dancing *perreo* as their only option. Within this context, reggaetón dancers were portrayed as victims of male reggaetón producers who took advantage of their desperate situation to employ them in videos for practically free.

However, this “sympathetic” portrayal of reggaetón women became more complicated as newspaper reporters began to include greater details of their stories and interviews with both dancers and male video producers. Ultimately, most descriptions of these women reiterated stereotypes about black working class female hypersexuality prevalent among supporters of the Anti-Pornography Campaign. Accounts of the women’s “deficient” moral upbringing in “broken families” reproduced many arguments that Oscar Lewis (1966) employed in his conceptualization of the culture of poverty. Contradictorily, such descriptions simultaneously depicted women as victimized by the music video industry and, at the same time, responsible for their own circumstances. This ambiguity resulted in media portrayals of female music video dancers as overwhelmingly hypersexual and, therefore, positioned at the bottom of the racial hierarchies inherent to dominant discourses of racial democracy.

Women’s occupations prior to dancing *perreo* provided some “evidence” in the media of their hypersexuality. Exotic dancing replaced prostitution as the assumed primary occupation of working class women. Interviews with music video producers revealed that one of the most common sites for recruitment of video dancers was strip clubs. Héctor Figueroa stated that he usually put out casting calls on local radio stations for dancers, and occasionally contracted “professional models”; however, often the majority of dancers in his videos came from strip clubs. All dancers and, in some cases their parents, were required to sign release forms in order to participate in music videos (González Rodríguez 2002a). Nevertheless, statements such as Figueroa’s also present the women as responsible for their own “moral degradation.” That mostly strippers participated in videos implied that such women were already immoral and hypersexual before dancing *perreo*, without the same degree of respectability represented by Denise Quiñones and Isis Casalduc.

Some newspaper interviews with video girls who frequently expressed that they enjoyed *perreando* contributed to this perception. For example, one article in *Primera Hora* focused on dancer Yaniv “Tiffany” Burgos Hernández. Accompanying the article was a picture of Tiffany, a young woman of mixed race photographed from behind, crouched over to emphasize her buttocks, and clad in tight jeans and a skimpy tube top. Like other girls, Tiffany grew up in a working class family, married and divorced at a young age, and had two children. She lived briefly in the United States, and upon returning to the island at age 21, began stripping to earn money. Tiffany described herself as an “exhibitionist” who enjoyed when other people watched her dance, but denounced stereotypes of reggaetón dancers as prostitutes (González Rodríguez 2002d).

Like the Miss Universe profiles, Tiffany’s biography included a description of her family relationships, especially with her mother and her six-year-old daughter. However, Tiffany’s family history differed dramatically from that of Denise Quiñones or Isis Casalduc. In general,

Tiffany claimed that her mother supported her career, and even transported her to the strip club where she worked before becoming a video dancer. Tiffany said, “*Mi madre me aplaudió, decía ‘Esta es mi hija.’ Me dice que bailo bien, pero las dos veces que la llevé al club salió llorando y mi pasión no es tanta como para hacer sufrir a mi mamá*” [My mother applauded me, she said ‘That’s my daughter.’ She tells me that I dance well, but the two times that I took her to the club, she left crying, and now my passion is not as strong because of having made my mother suffer] (qtd. in González Rodríguez 2002d). Although the description of her mother crying is striking, Tiffany emphasizes her mother’s support for her career both as a stripper and as a video dancer, and describes a close relationship with her. Tiffany also states that her own daughter has watched her dance in videos, and she has explained to the young girl that this is only a dance and “*no estoy haciendo nada malo*” [I am not doing anything wrong] (qtd. in González Rodríguez 2002d). As a result, Tiffany says that “*Como tenía en el video, se lo enseñé. Ella está loca con el baile, pero que no llegue al extremo de lo que hago, no me gustaría sino hasta que tenga la mayoría de edad*” [I taught [dancing] to her like it was in the video. She is crazy about the dance, but she does not reach the extreme that I do, I would not like that until she was of age] (qtd. in González Rodríguez 2002d).

Just as Denise Quiñones and Isis Casalduc learned particular ideas about morality and womanhood from their mothers, the intergenerational relationship between Tiffany, her mother, and her daughter reinforces several stereotypes of working class women’s sexuality. Her mother’s support of her career and Tiffany’s teaching her six-year-old daughter *perreo* implies that Tiffany’s willingness to *perrear* could be passed down through the generations. To a certain extent, Tiffany’s mother is portrayed in the article as one of the people responsible for Tiffany’s lifestyle, praising her daughter’s dancing in strip clubs and music videos. Likewise, Tiffany’s teaching her own daughter how to *perrear* at six-years-old implies that the young girl will continue to *perrear* when she is “of age.” These descriptions allude to the “immoral” sexuality associated with *perreo* as having been at least encouraged, if not passed down, between generations within Tiffany’s family, thus perpetuating the problem. Moreover, Tiffany’s recognition of her mother’s “suffering” after watching her dance, and that she herself would not like it if her own daughter danced before she was an adult, further blames Tiffany for her own situation by implying that she “knows” that she is doing something “bad” or “wrong” (despite her claims throughout the article that she is not). Thus, the portrayal of Tiffany as a product and perpetrator of an “indecent” sexuality that she might pass onto her own daughter along with her acknowledgement of the negative impact of her dancing on her mother depicts Tiffany as responsible for her own circumstances.

Newspapers featured several other interviews with reggaetón dancers who responded to the Anti-Pornography Campaign, as well. Like Tiffany, a few girls stressed that they enjoyed dancing *perreo*; however, most sought to distinguish themselves from the stereotypes of reggaetón dancers circulating during the Anti-Pornography Campaign. On the one hand, reggaetón dancers expressed a certain degree of erotic autonomy in these interviews, claiming that they enjoyed being “sexy” in music videos and declaring control over their own sexuality. However, at the same time, many of these women also distinguished between being “sexy” and dancing *perreo*. These women attempted to associate their erotic autonomy with the standards of respectability present in Puerto Rican society, inscribing certain women like Tiffany with the hypersexuality considered inconsistent with Puerto Rican values. The hypervisibility of these



women in media coverage of the Anti-Pornography Campaign thus motivated some reggaetón dancers to integrate themselves into the normalizing framework of respectability.

Two main themes emerged from newspaper interviews with reggaetón dancers. First, many girls underscored that music video sets were “respectful” and “professional” places (e.g. see Marrero-Rodríguez 2002b; González Rodríguez 2002d). As Tiffany described, “*En los vídeos siempre hay respeto, ninguno de los artistas se ha propasado conmigo, me brindaron una amistad hermosa. Sólo se baila. Nunca me han hecho proposiciones indecentes*” [There is always respect in the videos, none of the artists have gone too far with me, they have offered me a beautiful friendship. They only dance. They have never made me indecent proposals] (qtd. in González Rodríguez 2002d). Descriptions of music video sets such as Tiffany’s directly counter the portrayal of them by supporters of the Anti-Pornography Campaign as places where “immoral” activities take place. In describing the activities that occur in music video sets, Tiffany and her colleagues also attempt to redefine their identities within the parameters of respectability in Puerto Rican society. While in some cases, the ability to dance “sexy” might exhibit a certain degree of erotic autonomy, these women are careful not to push the boundaries of respectability in their descriptions of their dancing and music video sets.

This point is further emphasized by the second common theme in interviews: the extent to which these women actually dance *perreo*. While Tiffany said she enjoyed *perreo*, many of the women profiled in newspapers claimed that they danced in reggaetón videos, but never did *perreo*. Some girls stated that, while they “respected” the girls who did dance *perreo*, they preferred not to. Dancer Vanessa Dávila stated, “*Respeto el baile, pero no lo comparto. No perreo, no voy a perrear aquí y en ningún video me verás perreando*” [I respect the dance, but I don’t partake in it. I don’t dance *perreo*, I am not going to dance *perreo* here, and you will never see me in a music video dancing *perreo*] (qtd. in González Rodríguez 2002b). An eighteen-year-old dancer, Gladys Peña, told *El Nuevo Día*, “*En realidad hay base para que piensan que los vídeos son pornográficos, pero no todos son iguales. Lo que yo hago es diferente porque no uso g-string ni bailo (perreando) [sic]*” [In reality, there is a basis to think that these videos are pornographic, but not all of them are the same. What I do is different because I do not use a g-string, and I don’t dance *perreo*] (qtd. in Pérez Rivera 2002c). Likewise, another dancer, Mariela Arias, said, “*Yo bailo reggaetón pero no perreando porque no tengo la destreza. Me divierto y tengo exposición, pero somos mas recatada...nunca bailarí de espalda a la cámara, ni saldría en g-string ni en la cama sola con un cantante. Tengo mi autoestima bien alta*” [I dance reggaetón, but not *perreo* because I do not have the skill. I have fun and have exposure, but we are more reserved...I would never dance with my back to the camera, nor would I come out in a g-string or alone with a singer in a bed. I have really high self-esteem] (qtd. in Pérez Rivera 2002c). All three women maintained that they had control over their own careers, chose what they wore, how they danced, and whom they danced with in their music videos. Moreover, newspapers further distinguished Arias and Peña from other reggaetón dancers by describing their schooling, Peña as a high school student hoping to major in Business Administration in college, and Arias as a cosmetology student. While none of these women chose to dance *perreo*, they did express “respect” for the dance that they considered a “skill.” Therefore, Dávila, Peña and Arias reinforced the importance of women’s choice to dance *perreo* or not, distinguishing themselves from girls like Tiffany without making forthright “moral” judgments. Nevertheless, by attempting to distance themselves from dancers like Tiffany, Dávila, Peña, and Arias sought

to present their sexuality within the boundaries of respectability and, by extension, Puerto Rican national identity.

Still, other dancers distanced themselves from girls who danced *perreo* on moral grounds. Another dancer, Paulette Vizcarrondo, said,

*Definitivamente, las mujeres que salen en esos vídeos están desprestigiando a la mujer. Ellas creen que son más mujeres porque hacen movimientos como si estuvieran teniendo sexo o salen en una cama con el cantante en un gistro (g-string), pero eso no es así. Un baile es un baile y una seducción es otra cosa, ¿porque tengo que hacer eso frente a otros? Eso es lo que daña reggaetón. A mí me buscan cuando quieren mujeres finas que proyectan una actitud sexy (qtd. in Pérez Rivera 2002c)*

[Definitely, the women who appear in these videos are damaging women's reputations. They think that they are more "women" because they do movements like if they were having sex or they appear in bed with a singer wearing a g-string, but it isn't like that. A dance is a dance and a seduction is something else, why do I have to do that in front of other people? That is what damages reggaetón. They look for me when they want refined women who project a sexy attitude]

Vizcarrondo shared with her colleagues a valorization of the woman's "right" to be "sexy," but drew a fine line between the "sexiness" of dancing and the "vulgarity" of *perreo*. She blamed women like Tiffany for damaging not only reggaetón's reputation, but also images of women more generally. In her attempt to define herself in terms of respectability, Vizcarrondo depicted certain women like Tiffany as hypersexual, reinforcing stereotypes of black female sexuality.

Nevertheless, even women who sought to separate their style of dancing from *perreo* were still subject to the same stereotypes as women like Tiffany. For example, while Peña, Arias and Vizcarrondo all expressed the difference between them and girls who danced *perreo*, the location of their interview on a music video set in the nightclub Reggae Planet and the article's accompanying photographs of young non-white women with long fingernails, tight jeans, and midriff-baring shirts reinforced stereotypes associated with women in reggaetón. Despite some of these women's attempts to apply the trope of respectability to their dancing, the media's intense focus on reggaetón dancers continued to portray working class black and brown women as the corrupting factor in Puerto Rican society. Indeed, these women's choices were situated in relation to individuals' hypersexuality rather than the broader socioeconomic issues that had been highlighted by male producers and artists. It was precisely this "individual" behavior and its potentially negative influence on young girls' self-esteem that the Anti-Pornography Campaign attempted to address through employing a politics of respectability. Women like Tiffany who expressed erotic autonomy were depicted as outside of the boundaries of respectability, and therefore Puerto Ricanness, even by their own peers. Thus, the portrayals of reggaetón women in the media during the Anti-Pornography Campaign ultimately reified the racial hierarchies that undergird discourses of racial democracy, positioning "hypersexual" blackness on one end, and "respectable" mixed-but-white Puerto Ricanness on the other.

## Conclusion: The End of a Moral Panic?

Reggaetón continued to grow popular even after González's legislation passed in August of 2002. Indeed, reggaetón artists even gained political clout; in 2008, Daddy Yankee moderated the gubernatorial debate in Puerto Rico and publicly endorsed Republican Senator John McCain for U.S. President (to the chagrin of many other members of the reggaetón community). On the surface, it appeared that reggaetón had become accepted as a national music and the moral panic surrounding *perreo* had subsided. The Anti-Pornography Campaign appeared to have sufficiently addressed reggaetón's ideological challenge to hegemonic discourses of racial democracy. Ultimately, the Anti-Pornography Campaign reinscribed hypersexuality, specifically female hypersexuality, as a trope of blackness in order to keep intact the racial hierarchies inherent to dominant constructions of racial democracy.

Once in a while, certain incidents or "crises" emerged that suggested the possibility that *perreo* was still a "problem." In May of 2003, *Primera Hora* reported that one hundred underage youth cut school in order to dance *perreo* at the club Happy Times in the city of Caguas (Rodríguez-Burns 2003a). In addition, officials discovered the students drinking only bottled water, which led many authorities, including Senator González, to conclude that they must have taken the drug ecstasy while they danced (Gómez 2003). In response to the crisis, *Primera Hora* published a special report on May 19, 2003, with the headline, "*Difícil criar en tiempos del perreo*" [Difficult to raise children in times of *perreo*], and included several articles that discussed parents' various strategies to educate their children (usually daughters) about sexuality, morality and safety. This particular report featured interviews with three reggaetón artists about their children's exposure to reggaetón, during which the artists argued that parents were responsible for teaching their children good morals (Tirado 2003). For many people, including Senator González, incidents such as the one at Happy Times revealed the need for constant monitoring of youth and reminded some that the threat of *perreo* was not completely abated.

Indeed, as during the Anti-Pornography Campaign, experts were frequently solicited by newspapers and sometimes the Special Commission to describe the impact of *perreo* on youth. Another special report by *Primera Hora* published in September 2003 consulted a "music specialist" who argued that reggaetón could incite violence and sexual behavior, and cause physical conditions such as loss of hearing or even the destruction of cells that carry messages from the inner ear to the brain (Vásquez 2003). In November of 2003, another reporter interviewed psychiatrist Victor Lladó Díaz and sociologist Enrique Gelpí Mehreb who claimed that the potentially disastrous effects of *perreo* could lead to even larger problems of extreme sexual promiscuity in adolescents, lower self-esteem in young girls, and the development of "pathologies" of sexual "exhibitionism" among youth (Dávila Esterlitz 2003). Occasional articles featuring expert opinions on the impact of *perreo* thus served as "warnings" of the potential problems associated with the music should monitoring of youth and their responses to it be ignored.

Senator González continued her work with the Special Commission for the Study of Violence and Sexual Content in the Media. Occasionally, newspapers covered the Commission's meetings and activities, which usually involved repeated analysis of the impact of media on youth, especially girls. In fall of 2002, the Commission published the results of a large survey regarding individuals' opinions about what changes should be made in the media. The survey

found that slightly over half of the respondents supported the Anti-Pornography Campaign and considered representations of women in television to be “denigrating” and “immoral” (Rodríguez 2002; Rodríguez Sánchez 2002; Vera 2002g). Besides the survey, which mostly included adults, González also concentrated on the impact of media, especially reggaetón, on youth in order to measure the success of the Anti-Pornography Campaign. In December of 2003, Senator González invited youth, mostly young girls, from public schools throughout the island to participate in a workshop entitled “*Videos: ¿Representación o Realidad?*” [Videos: Representation or Reality?]. The students expressed their opinions of reggaetón music videos and the influence such videos had on their self-esteem; much to the Commission’s surprise (at least, as reported by the newspaper), many of the youth stated that they viewed music videos as a representation that did not necessarily reflect reality. As such, while many disagreed with the representations of women in music videos, they did not feel obligated or pressured to emulate reggaetón dancers or even dance *perreo* at all (Justicia Doll 2003).

Also in 2003, *Primera Hora* published a special report that featured survey responses of two hundred youth, ages 15 to 24 years old, from throughout Puerto Rico. The survey found that slightly over one half of the respondents enjoyed dancing *perreo*, but, similar to the students interviewed by the Commission, never felt inspired by *perreo* to engage in illegal or “immoral” activity (M. Figueroa 2002). For example, *Primera Hora* found that only ten percent of the youth surveyed became sexually excited by *perreo*, while eighty-two percent, “*sostuvo que no acostumbra tener relaciones sexuales luego de practicar este baile*” [maintained that they were not accustomed to having sexual relations after engaging in this dance] (M. Figueroa 2003:2). Furthermore, the survey also concluded that the majority of respondents, eighty-eight percent, did not consume illegal substances while dancing *perreo*, and the few that did were almost all at least eighteen years old (M. Figueroa 2003). Surveys such as this one, and interviews such as that of the Commission and the students, suggested that just one year after the Anti-Pornography Campaign, youth did not seem highly affected by *perreo*. More adults, especially parents, began describing their discomfort with *perreo* as a generational issue, similar to their own parents’ objections to the twist or the merengue of their youth (e.g. see Rodríguez-Burns 2003b). Ultimately, the monitoring of youth by both newspaper surveys and government programs seemed to describe the subsiding of the moral panic (as long as youth were taught to avoid or at least have limited exposure to *perreo*).

The occasional crises that continued to surface around *perreo* combined with the frequent government symposia and media analyses dedicated to the impact of *perreo* on youth reveals the continuous contestation around hegemonic constructions of Puerto Rican national identity. To maintain the hegemony of racial democracy discourses, “hypersexuality” and “respectability” were continuously referenced. To that end, the surveys and symposia revealed that young people, especially girls, recognized respectability as one of the principle tropes defining Puerto Rican nationhood when they did not participate in the “immoral” behavior (e.g. premarital sexual relations or drug abuse) presumed to extend from *perreo*. Likewise, the “hypersexual blackness” of reggaetón was reiterated in media coverage concerning the various “crises” that occasionally took place. Thus, the racial hierarchies intrinsic to dominant discourses of racial democracy remained intact, with women like Denise Quiñones and Isis Casalduec embodying the racially mixed-but-white “respectable” Puerto Rican national identity and reggaetón once again representing a “hypersexual” blackness. Indeed, in the assertion of hegemonic discourses of racial democracy, the only blackness considered compatible with Puerto Ricanness was the

original African “third root” that served as a constitutive element of the racially mixed-but-white Puerto Rican society. On the other hand, the blackness represented by reggaetón and embodied by “hypersexual” music video dancers was once again emplaced within the *caseríos* and thus outside of Puerto Rican national space.

The continued salience of hegemonic discourses of racial democracy, and their correlating ideas about respectability, is made more evident by the continuation of the same stereotypes of female reggaetón dancers in contemporary Puerto Rican society.<sup>15</sup> Several of the young women I interviewed did not dance to reggaetón, either because they did not like it or because they were afraid of damaging their own reputation. Verónica stated that she could not dance reggaetón because “*ya me metí en la mente que bailar reggaetón es para cafres*” [I have in my mind that dancing reggaetón is for *cafres*]. Ana María said that she enjoyed dancing reggaetón alone because she felt that the “sensuality” of *perreo* often led men to behave inappropriately towards their female partners. Although Ana María saw men as the “inappropriate” dancers, she still felt judged by her peers for being a woman who danced *perreo*:

*Es verdad, yo lo considero como un injusto en ciertos modos porque a veces hasta los hombres están bailando bien provocadores y esto incita a nosotras, como que, tú puedes estar tranquila pero viene un hombre y te baila y es como que...es como, a veces... es como que nos juzguen, qué sé yo, por el simple hecho de bailar reggaetón.*

[Really, I consider it unfair in a way because sometimes men are dancing really provocatively and this excites us [girls], like, you can be calm but you see a man and he dances with you and its like...its like, sometimes...its like they judge us, I don't know, for the simple fact that we dance reggaetón].

Many of my young female interviewees therefore expressed some anxiety about being considered “bad” if they danced reggaetón.<sup>16</sup> The stereotypes associated with women who dance reggaetón persist, affirming the distinctions between the “respectability” represented by women like Miss Universe, and the “hypersexuality” associated with reggaetón.

In the end, the Anti-Pornography Campaign mobilized the trope of respectability as the basis of its response to the ideological challenge posed by reggaetón. Reggaetón had been accepted into the Puerto Rican mainstream, provided that it ultimately remained in its place at the bottom of the racial hierarchy that maintained racial democracy discourses. The Anti-Pornography Campaign reveals how pedagogical moves by the state secure hegemony as new ideologies emerge. However, even though the hegemony of racial democracy had been maintained, reggaetón continues to provide a space for the articulation of alternative interpretations of the entanglements of race, class, gender, and place in Puerto Rico. Indeed, as

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<sup>15</sup> In general, reggaetón artist Ivy Queen seems to be the exception to this rule. Rather than being considered an “immoral” woman, Ivy Queen is frequently lauded by reggaetón fans and detractors alike for standing up for women. For interesting discussions of Ivy Queen’s “agency” as a woman in reggaetón, see Báez 2006 and Vazquez 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, some of my male interviewees also expressed hesitation about dancing to reggaetón; however, rather than concern about their reputations, most of these young men were more nervous that dancing with the wrong girl, like someone else’s girlfriend or someone who their friend liked, could lead to an altercation with another man. Also, Tito, a hairdresser from Carolina, agreed with the general view that women who danced reggaetón degraded themselves, even though he frequently danced to it in clubs.

reggaetón has become more popular internationally, artists have been able to promote their new definitions of Afro-Puerto Rican identities to a wider audience, and, in the process, use reggaetón to call for a more inclusive and egalitarian construction of Puerto Rican identity.

## Chapter Six: “Africa me llama”: Race, Place, and Diaspora in Tego Calderón’s Reggaetón<sup>1</sup>

*“La realidad es que el contenido de las letras de Calderón sigue el modelo de sus predecesores, pero son su imagen y su flow, su afro y su raza y su diferencia las características que pueden enmascarar temporalmente las similitudes que posee con los raperos blancos. Su presentación personal siempre está íntimamente ligada a la re-racialización del rap boricua.”*

[The reality is that the content of Calderón’s lyrics follows the model of his predecessors, but his image and his flow, his Afro and his race and his *difference* are the characteristics that can temporarily trump the similarities he possesses with white rappers. His personal presentation is always intimately linked to the re-racialization of Puerto Rican rap]

--Félix Jiménez (2004)

*Me quiere hacer pensar  
Que soy parte de una trilogía racial  
Donde todo el mundo es igual  
Sin trata especial...  
Nunca va a haber  
Justicia sin igualdad  
Maldita maldad  
Que destruye la humanidad*

You want to make me think  
That I am part of a racial trilogy  
Where the whole world is equal,  
Without special treatment...  
There will never be justice  
Without equality  
Damn evil  
That destroys humanity

--Tego Calderón, “Loíza” (2002)

In 2006, MTV aired the special *My Block: Puerto Rico*, which featured MTV personality Sway traveling around the island with various reggaetón singers to learn about the music and Puerto Rican culture. He played baseball with Daddy Yankee, attended a cockfight with Don Omar, danced salsa with Ivy Queen and rode motorcycles with Julio Voltio. Tego Calderón’s segment took place in Loíza. The opening sequence featured images of Calderón performing on stage in front of a massive, faceless audience as Sway described him as the “underdog” and “heart of Puerto Rico.” To the sound of rapid bomba drumming, images of impoverished areas of Loíza, Afro-Puerto Rican youth dancing bomba and playing in the streets, and different Afro-Puerto Rican artifacts, including *vejigantes*, dance across the screen. Then, Calderón and Sway

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase “*Africa me llama*,” translated to “Africa is calling me,” is a lyric from Tego Calderón’s song, “Ni Fu Ni Fa.”

appear in an unmarked street of Loíza, where the interview begins with a description of bomba, which Calderón describes as the “African heritage of Puerto Rico” that exists “everywhere where Africans are.” After the brief discussion of bomba, Sway asks Calderón to describe Loíza:

**Sway:** Tell them exactly where we are.

**Calderón:** We’re really in a place where not even Puerto Ricans come. This is the hardest, the roughest. And this is me. This is my block, Loíza.

**Sway:** Loíza, all right, and these are the people of Loíza. What is this heritage, what makes Loíza one of the unique areas of Puerto Rico?

**Calderón:** It’s been 100% black population where the free slaves came. They got this land. They did the best they could. The history of blacks down here, they feel ashamed of the color of their skin, you know. Constantly on TV, they trying [*sic*] to make us laugh about us. You know, they paint their faces and all that shit.<sup>2</sup> That’s why I talk about it, and I’m not down with that shit.

**Sway:** You know what’s like, peculiar in a sense, when you come from other places, like I live in the [United] States, you would think that when you think Puerto Rico that everybody lives under one umbrella [*camera cuts to a Puerto Rican flag waving*], and came from the same place so the color skin doesn’t matter.

**Calderón:** That’s what they teach you in school. It’s like we’re a trilogy of races, black, Spanish, and Indian. Its not like that, you know, the way we are treated in society, jobs, school, blacks in Puerto Rico are inferior, in another level. And so now, having the power of doing music, I like to talk to people on Tego’s point of view. This is how I see things. Hate me or love me, I really don’t care. It’s been hard for Loíza forever, but people down here are happy and we have a lot of fun down here.

The camera cuts to more bomba drumming and dancing, as Sway turns to Calderón and says, “This is a part of the African heritage that you talk about in Loíza.” Calderón responds, “Yeah, that’s what it is, that’s what I want them to know. This is beautiful down here. This is my block, Loíza.” In the end, Sway joins the bomba dance, as a large crowd surrounds Calderón and shouts, “Puerto Rico!”

Tegui “Tego” Calderón Rosario was born in 1972 in Santurce, Puerto Rico, a working class neighborhood in San Juan. Throughout his childhood, Calderón lived in Río Grande, a town bordering Loíza, in Río Piedras, a university town outside of San Juan, and in Miami, Florida. In his travels between Puerto Rico and the United States, Calderón listened to U.S. hip hop and rap, Jamaican reggae, Puerto Rican underground, bomba and plena, and, especially, the salsa of Afro-Puerto Rican legendary singer Ismael Rivera. Calderón also formally studied percussion at the Escuela Libre de Música in Puerto Rico. Calderón has achieved tremendous success as a reggaetón artist, and is recognized as the first Spanish-language rapper to cross over

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout much of the twentieth century, Puerto Rican television has featured several popular blackface performers such as Ramón Rivero in the 1940s and Chianita in the 1970s. For more information about these and other representations of blackness on Puerto Rican television, see Rivero 2005.



onto hip-hop stations in New York. Calderón has received nominations for several awards including Latin Grammys and Billboard Awards. In 2005, Calderón became the first reggaetón artist to align his record label, Jiggiri Records, with a major transnational record corporation, Atlantic Records, which released his second album, *The Underdog/El Subestimado*, in 2006. Calderón also released *El Abayarde: Contra-Ataca* in 2007, collaborated with several other artists including Aventura, Akon, 50 Cent, and numerous reggaetón artists, and acted in movies like *Illegal Tender* (2007) and *Fast and Furious* (2009). Calderón's success has not only made him one of the most widely recognized reggaetón artists, but also played a critical role in "mainstreaming" reggaetón music in Puerto Rico.

Calderón's segment on *My Block: Puerto Rico* reflects his various and often conflicting positioning as a "black" reggaetón artist. Félix Jiménez (2004) argues that Calderón's blackness provides him a unique niche within the reggaetón scene. Indeed, despite the presence of other self-identified black artists such as La Sista or Don Omar (and the associations between reggaetón and blackness more generally), fans, critics, and scholars alike tend to recognize Calderón as the quintessential black reggaetón artist. First, Calderón's inclusion of Afro-Puerto Rican folkloric traditions, such as bomba, in his music and frequent references to Loíza in interviews establishes popular connections between him and the folkloric blackness that has been emplaced in Loíza. For example, in *My Block: Puerto Rico*, Calderón was the only artist to discuss Afro-Puerto Rican life and culture.<sup>3</sup> That his interview took place in Loíza with references to such popular signifiers of blackness as bomba and *vejigantes* demonstrates the extent to which his music and celebrity are often construed to represent the folkloric blackness associated with Loíza. As I described in Chapters Two and Three, this folkloric blackness has been included in dominant constructions of racial democracy as a signifier of the African influence in Puerto Rico's racial triad.

In this context, Calderón embodies a particular understanding of blackness that is easily encompassed within hegemonic representations of Puerto Rican identity. Tego Calderón's reggaetón career<sup>4</sup> began concurrently with the mainstreaming of reggaetón in general, shortly after the end of Senator Velda González's Anti-Pornography Campaign (see Chapter Five). The Anti-Pornography Campaign's attempt to accommodate reggaetón into hegemonic depictions of racial democracy served as a turning point in reggaetón's development, providing publicity for hitherto unknown artists and revealing the potentially massive commercial market for the music (see Chapter Five). Several artists took notice, and resolved to "clean up" their lyrics and image to take advantage of the opening provided by the Anti-Pornography Campaign's publicity. In 2002 and 2003, reggaetón record sales skyrocketed, comprising about a third of the ten most popular albums in Puerto Rico (R. Rivera and Negrón-Muntaner 2007). Because of this commercial success, the genre also entered the political arena, with politicians selecting reggaetón campaign songs "to show off their hipness and try to appeal to younger voters" (R.

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<sup>3</sup> It is worth mentioning that Don Omar's segment, which mostly focused on a local cockfight, included a brief discussion about Puerto Rican culture in Piñones, although they did not discuss race. Piñones is located between Loíza and San Juan. Many of my friends and family considered Loíza and Piñones to be very similar; however, Piñones has not received the same degree of institutionalization of cultural practices as Loíza. Consequently, unlike Loíza, Piñones has not been integrated into dominant constructions of the racial triad presumed to comprise Puerto Rican identity.

<sup>4</sup> Tego Calderón first established himself as a local rapper before participating in reggaetón (R. Rivera 2004; Personal Communication 2/29/08).

Rivera and Negrón-Muntaner 2007). With reggaetón's increasing popularity, the music became more accepted into the national stage by elites and critics who had previously opposed it.

These developments immediately preceded Tego Calderón's entrance onto the reggaetón scene. The release of his first album *El Abayarde* was met with critical acclaim, and even Senator Velda González endorsed Calderón's debut on national television. Tego Calderón's entrance to the mainstream was epitomized by his March 2003 concert in San Juan's Coliseo Roberto Clemente. Newspapers covered the preparations for the highly anticipated concert in great detail, from the set list to the invited musicians to Calderón's outfits and hairstyles (Pagán Sánchez 2003a; Pagán Sánchez 2003b; Pagán Sánchez 2003c). Individuals of all ages and socioeconomic classes, including famous musicians and sports figures, attended the concert (Rivera Meléndez 2003). In his performance, Calderón included not only a live band (rare for reggaetón artists at the time), but also appearances by several musicians including salsa artist Roberto Roena and fellow reggaetón singers Yandel, Yaga, Mackie, and Eddie Dee (Rivera Meléndez 2003). Ultimately, the concert was considered a great success, prompting Laura Rivera Meléndez (2003) to write in her review for *El Nuevo Día*,

*El género del rap podría encontrarse en su momento evolutivo más importante y romper los límites de audiencia a los que se ha confinado en los últimos años. Tego Calderón demostró el viernes, antes un Coliseo Roberto Clemente lleno a capacidad, que cualquier género al que se le dedique tiempo y cuidado musical puede trascender a los prejuicios y convertirse en portavoz de variadas generaciones y clases sociales.*

[The genre of rap can find itself in its most important evolutionary moment and break the boundaries of the audience to which it has been confined in the past few years. Tego Calderón demonstrated on Friday, before a sold out Coliseo Roberto Clemente, that whatever genre to which musicians dedicate their time and musical care can transcend prejudices to become the voice for various generations and socioeconomic classes.]

As Raquel Z. Rivera and Frances Negrón-Muntaner (2007) have recently argued, Calderón's performance symbolized the newfound acceptance of reggaetón in Puerto Rican society.

The favorable reviews of Tego Calderón's performance and album thrust him into the national spotlight, and allowed him to reach audiences beyond the working class *caserío*. As Calderón explained, "*Yo soy quien llevó la música a esas urbanizaciones caras y a...los abogados y las otras clases*" [I am the one who brought the music to those expensive *urbanizaciones* and to the lawyers and other [socioeconomic] classes] (Personal communication 2/29/08). Raquel Z. Rivera and Frances Negrón-Muntaner (2007) point out that part of Calderón's appeal was his fusion of salsa and other Puerto Rican musical traditions with reggaetón. The incorporation of bomba and frequent comparisons with national salsa icon Ismael Rivera positioned Calderón in the Puerto Rican mainstream as an artist "who could be trusted to carry on the nation's officially recognized musical traditions" (R. Rivera and Negrón-Muntaner 2007). As demonstrated in his segment on *My Block: Puerto Rico* and the concert in Coliseo Roberto Clemente, Calderón incorporates into his music and performances already nationalized signifiers of blackness, such as bomba, that have been institutionalized as symbols of the African "root" in dominant constructions of racial democracy. In turn, this folkloric blackness is attributed to Calderón, too. As I described in Chapters Four and Five, many of reggaetón's critics argued that the music was "foreign" and "distinct" from Puerto Rican culture

in part because of its presumed affiliation with an “abject” blackness; however, the popular associations between Tego Calderón and the folkloric blackness that has been integrated into hegemonic discourses of racial democracy depict him as a uniquely Puerto Rican artist. In other words, it is the presumed alliance between Calderón and a very specific construction of folkloric blackness that enables Calderón to enter Puerto Rican national space.

And yet, Calderón’s appearance on *My Block: Puerto Rico* reveals another way of considering blackness in Puerto Rico. Tricia Rose (1994) has argued that the mainstream success of rap music in the United States has allowed rappers’ criticisms of societal issues such as classism and racism to reach a dramatically wider audience than they would have otherwise. Similarly, Calderón’s success as a reggaetón artist offers him a platform to promote alternative renderings of blackness that counter the privileging of whiteness in dominant discourses of racial democracy in Puerto Rico. For example, although Calderón’s interview on *My Block: Puerto Rico* involved several commonly recognized signifiers of folkloric blackness such as bomba, he situated them within a broader discussion and critique of racism in Puerto Rico. Through this process, Calderón discounts the dominant “folklorization” of Afro-Puerto Rican cultural practices as remnants of a romanticized past (Godreau 2002a). Instead, Calderón portrays these practices as expressions of the experiences of racial discrimination faced by contemporary marginalized Afro-Puerto Rican communities. Calderón often makes similar moves in his music, incorporating Puerto Rican musical traditions such as bomba in songs that address issues such as racism, classism, and colonialism. In the process, Calderón articulates new understandings of blackness as “modern” that refute the assumptions of a racially harmonious society that undergird dominant discourses of racial democracy in Puerto Rico.

Diasporic space makes possible these critical revisions of hegemonic Afro-Puerto Rican signifiers. As I have demonstrated throughout the dissertation, reggaetón incorporates diasporic resources from elsewhere in the African diaspora to create alternative expressions of blackness that respond to the particular circumstances of racial exclusion in their local communities. These alternative renderings of blackness are developed in part through the process of “mutual recognition,” in which young Puerto Ricans recognize similar experiences of racialization with other African diasporic populations (see Chapter Four). In several of his interviews and writings, Calderón details how his own experiences traveling to the United States and other countries in Latin America introduced him to new ways of imagining blackness. Calderón expresses these diasporic affinities in both the lyrics and beats in his music. Thus, listening to what Jocelyne Guilbault (2005) terms “audible entanglements” in Calderón’s music brings to light not only musical fusions, but also the social relations embedded within them that forge new understandings of blackness informed by both diaspora and the local dynamics of race in Puerto Rico.

Shalini Puri (2004) argues that discourses of hybridity hold the potential to both reinforce racial hierarchies and provide possibilities to counter these same hierarchies. This “ambivalence” within dominant discourses of racial democracy in Puerto Rico is partly revealed in the ambiguous positioning of Calderón as both representative of and resistive to the particular constructions of blackness that are consistent with hegemonic discourses of racial democracy. In this chapter, I examine various representations of Tego Calderón in order to consider both the contradictions inherent to racial democracy discourses in Puerto Rico, and the possibilities that participation in diasporic space yield for calling these same discourses into question. First, I

consider the popular associations between Tego Calderón and folkloric blackness frequently made by reggaetón fans and detractors alike. Calderón's positioning as the embodiment of the folkloric blackness that has been emplaced in Loíza has afforded him a particular niche in the reggaetón market that cause many fans to distinguish him from other black artists. Next, I complicate these assumptions about Calderón's persona by analyzing his descriptions of his engagement with an African diasporic space that has exposed him to a myriad of diasporic resources. As a result of this process, Tego Calderón articulates new understandings of blackness that are both uniquely Puerto Rican and reliant on diasporic connections between Puerto Rico and elsewhere the African diaspora in his music and writings. Ultimately, through a close examination of the multiple interpretations of Calderón's music and celebrity, this chapter considers the ambivalence and inconsistencies of discourses of racial democracy in Puerto Rico, and the possibilities that exist as a result of these ambiguities to challenge the whitening bias in hegemonic definitions of Puerto Rican national identity.

### ***“Llevando el Nombre de Loíza en Alto”*: Tego Calderón and Folkloric Blackness**

The location of Calderón's MTV interview in Loíza reflects the common associations between the artist and the town. For example, one letter to the editor that congratulated Calderón after his concert in Coliseo Roberto Clemente commented, *“Y como lo ha hecho hasta ahora, que viva orgulloso de ser boricua esté donde esté y de llevar el nombre de Loíza bien en alto”* [And like [Calderón] has done until now, I hope that he lives proud of being *boricua* wherever he goes, and carries the name of Loíza up high] (A. Rivera 2003). These connections between Tego Calderón and Loíza occur despite the fact that Calderón never actually lived in Loíza, although he attended bomba dances there frequently as a child with his father (R. Rivera 2004). In fact, other reggaetón singers have more “authentic” biographical claims to Loíza than Calderón.<sup>5</sup> As Calderón described in one interview, *“Lo de Loíza me ponen porque yo siento ese cariño del pueblo, pero en verdad yo me crié en Río Grande”* [They say I'm from Loíza because I feel the love of the people from there, but I really grew up in Río Grande] (qtd. in R. Rivera 2004:274). As opposed to other artists, Calderón has been able to capitalize on the popular associations between himself and Loíza in his music and image.

Folkloric blackness provides a critical link between Tego Calderón and Loíza. The emplaced blackness of Loíza has often been viewed as emblematic of this folkloric blackness, and dominant representations of the town as the epicenter of Afro-Puerto Rican culture underscore these connections (see Chapter Three). For instance, organizations such as the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña (ICP) have institutionalized bomba as symbolic of the African influence in Puerto Rican culture. At the same time, the ICP promotes a historical narrative that describes bomba as an antiquated practice transplanted directly from Africa. Despite the diversity of styles and musical innovations in bomba, this dominant narrative portrays it as static. This narrative assumes that whatever African diasporic connections evident in bomba are historical and exclusively result from the trans-Atlantic slave trade rather than any

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<sup>5</sup> For example, La Sista hails from Loíza, and while she is recognized as a *loiceña* and incorporates bomba in her recordings and performances, she has not been as internationally successful as Calderón. Also, Daddy Yankee's father, Ramon “El Negro” Ayala, was cousins with and a member of the Loíza-based bomba group, Los Hermanos Ayala (Marshall 2009:64, n.3).

contemporary engagements of Afro-Puerto Ricans with an African diasporic space. The presence of several important bomba families in Loíza symbolically links the town with “authentic” bomba performance. Consequently, these entanglements of race, place, and culture reinforce the folklorization of blackness that is consistent with racial democracy discourses in Puerto Rico. The links between Calderón and the folkloric blackness associated with Loíza in the popular imagination enable Calderón to be recognized as the embodiment of a blackness that can be easily accommodated within dominant constructions of a racially mixed-but-white Puerto Rican national identity.

Musically, these connections are represented by Tego Calderón’s incorporation of bomba rhythms into his songs. In several tracks on *El Abayarde*, such as “Loíza” and “Abayarde,” Calderón raps over hip hop beats that have been infused with bomba rhythms and percussion. Despite the many social and musical similarities between bomba and reggaetón, bomba is not audibly common in reggaetón (Marshall 2009: 64 n.3).<sup>6</sup> Calderón’s fusions of bomba and reggaetón are more of an “exceptional” rather than a typical reggaetón sound (Marshall 2009: 23, 64 n.3). Calderón considered the incorporation of bomba into his music critical for exposing bomba to a wider audience, although he described this move as a “risk” that initially raised skepticism by the reggaetón community (R. Rivera 2004:277). In spite of this risk, Tego Calderón’s bomba-infused reggaetón has now been widely accepted and celebrated by reggaetón fans and music critics.

In addition to the unique musical arrangements in Tego Calderón’s reggaetón, popular descriptions of his biography tend to emphasize the artist’s relationship to Loíza. Bomba and other Afro-Puerto Rican folkloric practices play a central role in these narratives. Although he did not grow up in Loíza, interviews with Calderón often emphasize his early exposure to Afro-Puerto Rican culture in Loíza. In one interview, Calderón described his childhood trips to Loíza:

*Constantemente estábamos en Loíza. Mi papá es del caserío de Río Grande. Él siempre nos llevaba a Loíza. Íbamos a bailes de bomba, bajábamos los santos siempre. Inculcó ese amor en mí* (qtd. in R. Rivera 2004:274).

[We were constantly in Loíza. My father is from a *caserío* in Río Grande. He always took us to Loíza. We went to bomba dances, the saints always mounted us.<sup>7</sup> It instilled this love in me.]

Bomba, along with African-based religions, are two of the main signifiers of blackness associated with Loíza. Such stories about Calderón’s childhood emphasize his knowledge and

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<sup>6</sup> Another artist who visually and musically incorporates bomba into her performance is La Sista from Loíza (Marshall 2009: 64 n.3). I attended a concert by La Sista in New York City’s Central Park on July 14, 2007. Not only did she include a DJ on stage (typical of most reggaetón artists), La Sista also included two bomba drummers, a four back-up vocalists, and several dancers dressed in folkloric costumes. Besides Tego Calderón, La Sista is one of the very few artists who includes such overt bomba signifiers in her performance (Marshall 2009: 64 n.3). However, she has not received the same fame as Calderón on either the Puerto Rican or international stage, although she has had a few successful singles on the radio.

<sup>7</sup> Here, Calderón refers to the process of possession typical of African-based religions in the Americas such as *santería*. Saints are said to “mount” individuals during religious ceremonies. As Samiri Hernández Hiraldo (2006) points out, Loíza is popularly considered one of the major, if not the main, center for African-based religions in Puerto Rico. Consequently, religion is another element that positions Loíza as the epicenter of black life and culture.

familiarity with the cultural practices associated with folkloric blackness. Moreover, these descriptions of Calderón's participation in African-based religion and music highlight the bodily experience of bomba dancing and spirit possession. This combination of cultural "expertise" and experience alludes to Calderón's positioning as the embodiment of the particular folkloric blackness that these cultural practices represent in the popular imagination.<sup>8</sup>

Because hegemonic discourses of racial democracy generally integrate this folkloric blackness into depictions of Puerto Rican identity, the associations between Calderón and Loíza position him as a Puerto Rican artist. That is, although most reggaetón artists are attributed with a particular abject blackness and, therefore, distinct from Puerto Ricanness (see Chapter Four), the particular entanglements of race, place, and culture that are attributed to Calderón position him as a uniquely Puerto Rican artist. For example, Ana María, a twenty-one year old college student and reggaetón fan from San Juan, considered Calderón one of her favorite reggaetón artists because of his integration of "*lo cultural*":

*Me gusta mucho...a Tego porque, qué sé yo, porque los ritmos son muy diferentes, se mezcla mucho con lo cultural, por ejemplo mezcla mucho con la bomba. Si se va a Loíza, a él se han hecho homenaje y todo. Y de hecho varias canciones de él empiezan con una intonación que tiene que ver con la bomba, y he ido a las presentaciones de él en vivo y él incorpora, tiene sus bailarines como todos, pero tiene una muchacha que sigue y baila bomba, y eso él incorpora también, y eso me encanta, qué sé yo, porque la bomba es algo cultural de aquí, no sé, no se identifica mucho allí pero me gusta.*

[I really like Tego because, I don't know, because his beats are different, he mixes them a lot with *lo cultural*, for example he mixes it a lot with bomba. If you go to Loíza, they have made tributes to him and everything. In fact, in some of his songs it begins with an intonation that sounds like bomba, and I've been to concerts where he incorporates, he has his dancers like everybody else, but he has a girl who dances bomba and he incorporates this as well, and I love that, because, I don't know, bomba is a cultural thing from here, and I don't identify with it a lot but I like it.]

Ana María's comments reflect several common themes in the dominant portrayal of Calderón and his music. Similar to the interpretations of Calderón's biography, Ana María's reference to Calderón's incorporation of bomba, which she defines as a "cultural thing" from Puerto Rico, alludes to his connections to the folkloric blackness that has been constructed as evidence of Puerto Rico's African heritage. Significantly, depictions of Calderón such as Ana María's reveal that it is Calderón's blackness and participation in Afro-Puerto Rican cultural practices that provide the basis for his Puerto Rican identity.

Calderón's positioning as the embodiment of the folkloric blackness associated with Loíza distinguishes him from the abject blackness that has typically been attributed to reggaetón artists and fans. For example, although Adriana, a nineteen-year-old student from San Juan, generally disliked reggaetón, she praised Tego Calderón for his distinct "style." When I asked her whether or not she enjoyed Calderón's music, she answered:

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<sup>8</sup> Here it is not my intention to discredit Calderón's childhood experiences; rather, I aim to point out the ways in which his biography has been interpreted to further the popular associations between him, the town of Loíza, and dominant constructions of folkloric blackness.

*No me gusta tanto. Pero, como te digo, como es tan diferente, tanto las mismas canciones de Don Omar, habla lo mismo, pero no sé. Tiene algo diferente, es el tono de voz, el estilo de él, sabes...el hecho de que está haciendo lo que hace, pues, por eso lo tiene que dar credito.*

[I don't like it so much. But, I'll tell you, he is so different, he has almost the same songs as Don Omar, they talk the same, but I don't know. He has something different, it's the tone of his voice, his style, you know...the fact that he is doing what he does, well, for this you have to give him credit.]

Adriana's description of Calderón's unique "style" and "tone of voice" allude to the artist's perceived connections to nationalized signifiers of blackness in Puerto Rico, especially bomba and early salsa. Calderón's distinctive style harkens back to salsa singers of the 1960s and 1970s who have since become national icons,<sup>9</sup> especially renowned Afro-Puerto Rican artist Ismael Rivera.<sup>10</sup> For example, Calderón's trademark Afro hairstyle is reminiscent of the *cocolos*, or young salsa fans, during the 1970s and 1980s (Aparicio 1998; Berríos-Miranda 2004; Duany 1984).<sup>11</sup> Though she does not explicitly mention bomba, Adriana's reference to Calderón's tone of voice also alludes to his associations with bomba and Ismael Rivera (an artist who was also heavily influenced by bomba aesthetics), a comparison often made in the descriptions of Tego Calderón in popular Puerto Rican newspapers (e.g. see Pagán Sánchez 2002b; Pagán Sánchez 2003a; Pagán Sánchez 2003b; Pérez Ramírez 2006).

The connections that Adriana draws between Calderón and dominant constructions of folkloric blackness are made even more evident in her contrast between Calderón and other reggaetón artists when she mentions Don Omar, another black artist who hails from the San Juan

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<sup>9</sup> It is important to note that the nationalization of salsa occurred despite its initial rejection by Puerto Rican elites as a result of the working class, diasporic, and Afro-Caribbean roots of the genre (Flores 2009; Berríos-Miranda 2004). As salsa grew more popular, new artists arrived with "*salsa romántica*" in the 1980s; as opposed to early versions of salsa, *salsa romántica* included themes about romantic love and tended to be performed by "whiter" artists (Aparicio 1998:73; Negus 1999; Washburne 2002). *Salsa romántica* became more mainstream and palatable to upper and middle class audiences (Aparicio 1998:73; Washburne 2002). At the same time, salsa became recognized as a "national" music, circulating within the national space of Puerto Rico (Aparicio 1998; Quintero Rivera 1989). Within this context, the early salsa artists from the 1960s have become recognized as icons of Puerto Rican popular music. For example, Puerto Rico has an annual *Día Nacional de la Salsa* (National Day of Salsa) that honors a different artist each year.

<sup>10</sup> Ismael Rivera was a popular Afro-Puerto Rican salsa singer from the 1950s through the 1970s. I discuss his work later in this chapter.

<sup>11</sup> "*Cocolo*" was originally a derogatory term used to describe "very dark-skinned" people; according to Jorge Duany (1984), the meaning of *cocolo* changed in the 1960s and 1970s to refer to working class, uneducated individuals regardless of race (200). With the growing popularity of salsa in the 1970s, *cocolo*'s meaning changed once more to refer to working class, predominantly black and brown salsa fans. Frances Aparicio (1998) defines *cocolos* as "young black men who attend salsa concerts and who drive old Toyotas with the driver's seat lowered and the loudspeakers playing salsa" (69). Jorge Duany (1984) describes the stereotypical *cocolo* as "a teenager who wears outmoded flowered shirts, polyester pants, tennis shoes and an Afro pick in the hair. *Cocolos* sport monstrous radios or cassette players wherever they go and listen to an all-*salsa* station like Zeta 93. They live in Nemesio Canales or another of the public housing projects in San Juan" (200). Aparicio (1998) and Duany (1984) also note that in the 1980s, the opposite of *cocolos* were *rockeros*, predominantly middle and upper class white youth who listened to U.S. rock.

neighborhood of Santurce.<sup>12</sup> Although more recently Don Omar's music has moved towards house-influenced pop and *bálada* love songs, he also has several reggaetón songs about *caseríos* and urban life (which, Adriana later stated, encourage violence among young people). Unlike Calderón, Don Omar has been implicated in several scandals, including allegedly assaulting a waiter at a Denny's restaurant, and having presumed connections to José Luis "Coco" López, one of the biggest drug lords in Puerto Rico (Rivera Vargas 2003; Tirado 2006c). For Adriana, Don Omar represents a "typical" reggaetón artist who embodies many of the stereotypes (violence, hypersexuality, drugs) associated with abject blackness and, by extension, *caseríos*. Adriana's comparison of Tego Calderón and Don Omar alludes to the circulation of the distinct constructions of blackness as abject and folkloric in Puerto Rico. Although Tego Calderón sings reggaetón, she acknowledges him as a unique artist who does not conform to the same abject blackness as other reggaetón artists.

Thus, blackness affords Tego Calderón the possibility of being accepted into the Puerto Rican mainstream since the Afro-Puerto Rican cultural practices he integrates into his music are already recognized as emblematic of the African components of racial democracy. Once Calderón entered the commercial reggaetón scene, his blackness could be more accommodated within racial democracy discourses due to his affiliations with Loíza than is the case with other reggaetón artists who had been targeted in censorship campaigns. Although his connections to folkloric blackness have facilitated Calderón's entrance into the mainstream, he uses his music and writings to criticize the same constructions of folkloric blackness and racial democracy. In fact, as a highly visible artist, Tego Calderón is often praised for making significant social commentaries regarding racial inequalities in Puerto Rico and elsewhere in Latin America. The commentaries Calderón included in his music bring to light some of the contradictions embedded within dominant discourses of racial democracy, particularly the claims to a racially harmonious society.

### **"If You're Black, You're Black": Calderón's Articulations of Mutual Recognition**

Tego Calderón draws from the same associations with Loíza that fostered his entrance to the mainstream to express new understandings of blackness that depart from dominant images of folkloric blackness. Calderón's innovative understandings of blackness are made possible in part via his participation in an African diasporic space. As discussed in Chapter Four, engagement in diasporic space enables individuals in one location to recognize similar experiences of racialized exclusion with other African diasporic sites (Hintzen, Rahier, Smith 2010). In turn, through this process of "mutual recognition," individuals imagine new definitions of blackness that incorporate diasporic resources from other sites of the African diaspora (Brown 1998). These depictions of blackness reinforce the humanity of blackness that is typically disavowed by modern discourses such as racial democracy.

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<sup>12</sup> Here it is important to note that Tego Calderón does not separate himself from his reggaetón colleagues in the same way. Although he often describes himself as more of a hip hop rather than reggaetón artist, Calderón does not distinguish himself from artists like Don Omar on the grounds of race. In other words, while Adriana describes a difference between Tego's blackness and Don Omar's blackness, Tego Calderón has not expressed comparable distinctions. In fact, Calderón not only has collaborated with Don Omar on several recordings (e.g. "Los Bandoleros" and "Chillin'"), he has also praised Don Omar's embracing of a black identity (e.g. see Calderón 2009).



Although Calderón's biography has often been used to authenticate his claims to Loíza, his experiences in Puerto Rico and the United States show how his engagement with other African diasporic populations exposed Calderón to alternative definitions of blackness. In many of his writings and songs, Calderón frequently asserts the need to encourage "black pride" among Afro-Puerto Ricans and Afro-Latinos more generally (e.g. see Byron 2006; Calderón 2009; Tirado 2006c). To exemplify this need, Calderón discusses his own experiences as a child, often crediting his parents with teaching him to be proud of his blackness. Calderón considered one specific childhood experience as formative in developing his black identity:

*Cuando, pues, yo era más joven, mi mamá se reía porque iba a jugar pelota en un barrio de Carolina...y todos los nenes eran más negro que yo, y yo le decía a mi mamá que yo no quería ser más negro ni quería tener la nariz más grande. Y mi mamá se echó a reír como "¡Este muchachito está loco!"* (Personal Communication 2/29/08).

[Well, when I was younger, my mother laughed because I was playing baseball in a neighborhood in Carolina, and all the kids were blacker than me, and I told my mother that I didn't want to be black, nor did I want to have a big nose. And my mother laughed at me, like, "This little boy is crazy!"]

For Calderón, this type of story is typical for many black youth in Puerto Rico, who, as he stated in his interview with *My Block: Puerto Rico*, "feel ashamed of the color of their skin."

According to Calderón, the "shame" of blackness among Afro-Puerto Ricans is perpetuated by "miseducation" that presents blackness as inferior. When asked why Afro-Puerto Ricans were "not proud enough of being black" in a *Source Latino* magazine interview, Calderón answered, "I think it's a system that we grow up with. It's handed down from generations. So then you create a situation in your mind where you feel less of a person. It's what they teach you" (qtd. in Byron 2006:62). According to Calderón, statistics from a local survey provide striking evidence of the effects of this "miseducation:"

*[H]ay muchos puertorriqueños que son descendientes de negros, que son una mezcla de negro y blanco, pues se consideran blancos, y eso...había un censo, una encuesta que hizo aquí, que el ochenta y nueve por ciento de los puertorriqueños eran blancos, y es algo que no es real, pero la gente lo cree, creen que son blancos. Y esto es el problema que tenemos aquí. Aquí hay mucha desinformación...que ha pasado de abuelo a hijo, y de hijo a hijo...* (Personal Communication 2/29/08).

[There are many Puerto Ricans who are descendents of blacks, that are a mix of black and white, well, they consider themselves white, and this...there was a census, a survey that they did here, where eighty-nine percent of Puerto Ricans were white, and this is something that is not real, but the people believe it, they believe that they are white. And that is the problem that we have here. Here there is a lot of misinformation...that has passed from grandfather to son, from son to son...]

What Calderón identifies as "miseducation" is intimately connected to the misrecognition of blackness as the "primitive" counterpoint to whiteness and therefore supposedly distinct from the characteristics associated with European modernity. Despite its inclusive rhetoric, racial democracy discourses uphold these divisions between "primitive" blackness and "modern"

whiteness, thus establishing modern racial hierarchies in Puerto Rico (see Chapter Two). In this context, what Calderón terms “miseducation” constitutes what he perceives to be the impact of the misrecognition of blackness on Puerto Rican society—that is, a widespread sense of inferiority and “shame” among Afro-Puerto Ricans.

Calderón has extended his comments regarding this “miseducation” in Puerto Rico to other areas of Latin America, as well. In 2007, Calderón published a widely cited editorial in the *New York Post*, the fastest growing newspaper in New York City and the fifth largest paper in the United States ([www.newyorkpost.com](http://www.newyorkpost.com)). Throughout the article, Calderón describes his personal experiences with racism in both the United States and Latin America, especially Puerto Rico. Central to Calderón’s argument is the acknowledgement of different types of racism in Latin America and the United States while rejecting the notion that the U.S. is “more” racist.<sup>13</sup> Rather than the openly segregationist policies of the United States, Calderón considers racism in Latin America to have a more covert societal impact that causes Afro-Latinos to devalue their blackness:

The reality of blacks in Latin America is severe, in Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, Honduras...

Puerto Rican (and Latin American) blacks are confused because we grow up side by side with non-blacks and we are lulled into believing that things are the same. But we are treated differently...We are definitely treated like second-class citizens, and we are not part of the government or institutions...They have raised us to be ashamed of our blackness (Calderón 2009:325).

Calderón’s acknowledgement of the commonalities between Puerto Rico and Latin American countries such as Honduras and Colombia involves the recognition of similar systems of racialized exclusion that adversely affect the countries’ black populations. The recognition of comparable experiences with racial exclusion creates the conditions of possibility to forge new diasporic links between Afro-Latin American communities.

Not only does Tego Calderón express these diasporic connections with other Afro-Latin American communities, but also with black populations in the United States. Many Afro-Latino immigrants to the United States describe encounters with new forms of racism in the United States perpetrated by both U.S. Americans and other Latinos (e.g. J. Flores 2005; J. Flores 2009; Quiñones Rivera 2006).<sup>14</sup> For Tego Calderón, living in Miami as a teenager exposed him to another system of racial classification that made him feel more affiliated with the African American community than other Latino groups:

When I lived in Miami, I was often treated like a second class Boricua. I felt like I was in the middle - Latino kids did not embrace me and African American kids were confused

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<sup>13</sup> Early scholarship regarding race in Latin America often considered this distinction as evidence of more lenient race relations in Latin America than in the U.S. Thus, Tego Calderón makes an important intervention by acknowledging both the similarities and the differences throughout the Americas.

<sup>14</sup> Several scholars have argued that “Latino” identities in the U.S. have been constructed as a whitened racial category that does not include Afro-Latinos (e.g. J. Flores 2005; T. Hernández 2003). Moreover, many Afro-Latinos also experience racism from Latino communities who harbor their own ideas about racial hierarchies and identities from their home countries.

because here I was a black boy who spoke Spanish. But after a while, I felt more embraced by black Americans - as a brother who happens to speak Spanish - than other Latino kids did (Calderón 2009:324).

Calderón's experience of initial isolation and eventual acceptance by African American youth became an important aspect of his recognition of black solidarity across linguistic and national boundaries.

Calderón's social integration into the local African American community in Miami also introduced him to African American cultural practices and icons that served as referents for new constructions of blackness. For example, while in Miami, Calderón learned about the history and symbols related to the U.S. Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Icons such as Malcolm X became critical diasporic resources for Calderón as he created new images of blackness:

[W]hen I went to Miami, I found out about [Malcolm X]. Maybe he doesn't belong to my culture, but for some reason I felt it was my culture, because I felt that you're black, whether you speak Spanish, Italian, speak whatever language. If you're black, you're black. So then I identified with the pride that black Americans have in their heritage. And so it helped me a lot to find myself, for me to have come here and learned that blacks are proud of their race. And I felt bad because us Latinos, the black Latinos, want to imitate and want to say that we are *españoles*, and we're not. We are *negros* (Byron 2006:62).

For Calderón, African American struggles for racial equality in the United States exposed him to new ideas about blackness that, in his experience, had been denied or absent in a Puerto Rican context. Calderón's experiences in Miami led him to identify with the "pride" that he witnessed in the African American community in the United States, and to claim his inclusion in a "black culture" that extended beyond national boundaries. Applying diasporic resources from African American culture to his own experience as a "black Latino" "render[ed] visible the 'space' of self-recognition and self-consciousness" that had hitherto been occluded by the limited representations of blackness that were propagated by hegemonic constructions of racial democracy in Puerto Rico (Hintzen, Rahier, Smith 2010). Consequently, Calderón's engagement with other African diasporic populations yielded new possibilities for imagining his own Afro-Puerto Rican identity.

Calderón views African American culture as an important diasporic resource for reconsidering Afro-Latino identities more generally. In his *New York Post* editorial, Calderón (2009) argues that "Black Latinos are not respected in Latin America and we will have to get [respect] by defending our rights, much like African Americans struggled in the U.S." (326). As part of this process, Calderón (2009) advocates the development of new institutions such as schools and media devoted to teaching the history and culture of Afro-Latino communities (325). On the one hand, this argument may appear to impose U.S. understandings of race relations onto other contexts, a move that has at times led to dangerous descriptions of Latin America as "raceless" when compared with the history of legalized racial segregation in the United States.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Mid-twentieth century academics from both the United States and Latin America often argued that the lack of *de jure* segregation in Latin American countries made them "less" racist than the United States. Indeed, as I described in Chapter Two, Puerto Rican scholars such as Tomás Blanco used these comparisons in an attempt to delegitimize

However, in this particular case, Calderón's reliance on the U.S. Civil Rights Movement for his assessment of racial circumstances in Latin America can be understood as a diasporic resource that illuminates new possibilities for imagining blackness in Latin America. Indeed, Calderón (2009) is careful to point out the specificities of race relations in Latin America throughout his editorial, arguing that "They tell blacks in Latin America that we are better off than U.S. blacks or Africans and that we have it better here, but it's a false sense of being. Because here, it's worse" (325). Calderón's prescription for addressing both the socioeconomic and psychological consequences of racism in Puerto Rico and Latin America more generally is informed in part through his engagement with other African diasporic populations throughout the Americas.

Indeed, Tego Calderón's description of the impact of African American culture in defining his own identity demonstrates the ways that individuals employ diasporic resources in order to create new understandings of blackness. Although recognizing transnational linkages with other African diasporic populations is critical to the development of these reconfigurations of blackness, these images of blackness respond to very localized conditions of racial exclusion. Similar to the issues presented in his writings and interviews, the unique renderings of blackness expressed in Tego Calderón's music address Afro-Puerto Rican life in contemporary Puerto Rico. Calderón's expressions of a unique Afro-Puerto Rican identity in his music constitute part of a larger musical tradition on the island. Prior to reggaetón, other musical practices such as bomba and salsa performed similar functions for working class and Afro-Puerto Rican communities. Just as Calderón incorporates diasporic resources from other sites in the African diaspora into his music, he also draws from local Afro-Puerto Rican musical practices and histories as well.

### **"Hacer Nuestra Punta de Vista": Puerto Rican Popular Music and African Diasporic Space**

Puerto Rican popular music includes several genres that emerged from working class, predominantly black communities such as bomba, plena, and salsa. Similar to reggaetón, such musical practices provide an important means of expression for Afro-Puerto Rican communities to respond to their experiences of racialized exclusion and, at times, highlight their cultural, social, and political connections with other sites of the African diaspora. To that end, Calderón describes Afro-Puerto Rican musical practices ranging from bomba to rap and reggaetón as "laments" that are similar to other musical traditions in the African diaspora:

*[T]odo esto...manera social negroide, como decía, como se llamaba aquí a Juan Boria<sup>16</sup>, Palés Matos, pues...viene obviamente de África...son un lamento, ...son una queja. Y no es casualidad, de eso surge formas de música como el blues, la bomba en Puerto Rico, en Cuba el guaguancó<sup>17</sup> y sus toques, tú sabes, eran lamentos como los esclavos tenían para liberar este abuso de que estaban bajando, y estas injusticias, esta desigualdad. Y todos estos ritmos, yo creo que van de la mano. Y en el caso de nosotros, pues, somos los hijos*

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U.S. colonialism on the island. For a more detailed discussion of these debates in Latin America more broadly, see Wade 1997.

<sup>16</sup> Juan Boria is another Afro-Puerto Rican poet known for including issues of race and Afro-Puerto Rican culture in his work.

<sup>17</sup> Guaguancó is the basic rhythm of Afro-Cuban rumba.

*de esa gente, en gran parte, o descendientes de esa gente* (Personal Communication 2/29/08).

[[A]ll of this *social negroide*, like they called it, like here [in Puerto Rico] they would call Juan Boria, Palés Matos, well...it obviously comes from Africa...they are laments, they are complaints. And it is not a coincidence that from this appears musical forms like the blues, Puerto Rican bomba, guaguancó and its rhythms in Cuba, you know, they were laments that the slaves had to liberate themselves from the abuse they were under, and the injustice, that inequality. And all of these rhythms, I think they go together. And in our case, well, we are the children of those people, for the most part, or their descendents.]

Calderón thus positions Puerto Rican music as part of a much larger African diasporic musical tradition that speaks to the misrecognition of blackness within European modernity. The similarities between African diasporic musical practices, including Puerto Rican ones, extend beyond rhythmic and melodic structures to articulate social and historical connections between black communities throughout the Americas. Moreover, Calderón's comments underscore the historical use of music as a method to articulate new understandings of blackness, tracing this process back to American slave plantations of the nineteenth century. Ultimately, Calderón's description of African diasporic musical traditions, including rap and reggaetón, as "laments" reflects the ways that music expresses diasporic linkages and counters local experiences of racialized exclusion.

In positioning Puerto Rican popular music alongside other African diasporic musical traditions, Tego Calderón highlights the history of expressing alternative constructions of blackness in Puerto Rican popular music, including those genres that have been incorporated into so-called "racial democracy" as emblematic of Puerto Rico's African heritage. For example, the dominant narrative of bomba describes its genesis on slave plantations, but ignores the origins of the music as a form of communication amongst enslaved Africans (Alamo-Pastrana 2009; Barton 1995). Bomba provided opportunities to counter the harsh realities of slavery, both through the pleasure of musical performance and by creating a private space away from the gaze of plantation owners for the organization of rebellions (Alamo-Pastrana 2009; Reyes 2006). After the abolition of slavery, bomba continued to flourish in Puerto Rico, and currently the development of new bomba "youth bands" perform the music in ways that speak to their particular concerns regarding racism, colonialism, sexism, and a host of other social issues (Alamo-Pastrana 2009). As opposed to narratives of a "static" and "antiquated" bomba tradition which conform to dominant racial democracy discourses, bomba is a dynamic musical practice that has provided a space for the renegotiation of definitions of blackness in Puerto Rico over the course of several generations.

Bomba has impacted the development of other forms of Puerto Rican popular music that are also important expressions of alternative black subjectivities in Puerto Rico. The popular musical group Cortijo y su Combo innovated new techniques of playing bomba that popularized the music in the 1950s. The group produced a more "modern" style of bomba by integrating it with Cuban-style arrangements considered by many to be the precursor to contemporary salsa

(Figueroa Hernández 2002:19; A. Flores 2004:66-67; J. Flores 2004).<sup>18</sup> In 1952, Rafael Cortijo founded Cortijo y su Combo, featuring his childhood friend Ismael Rivera as lead vocalist (A. Flores 2004:64; J. Flores 2004:3, 4). Before its dissolution in 1962, Cortijo y su Combo recorded several classic songs, ranging from old bombas like “*El Bombón de Elena*” to political commentaries. Cortijo y su Combo broke many of the barriers traditionally facing black musicians in Puerto Rico. Ismael Rivera described the period when he and Cortijo worked together as “*el tiempo de la revolución de los negros en Puerto Rico*” [the time of the black revolution in Puerto Rico], when Afro-Puerto Ricans began entering the university, and Roberto Clemente and Orlando Cepeda gained success in Major League Baseball (qtd. in Figueroa Hernández 2002:19; see also J. Flores 2004:5). During this time, Cortijo y su Combo became the first all-black band to perform in the prestigious Hotel Condado in San Juan, and frequently appeared on television programs that had never before included black musicians (Figueroa Hernández 2002:23; A. Flores 2004:69-70; J. Flores 2004:5).

In addition to folkloric Afro-Puerto Rican cultural practices such as bomba, Tego Calderón also frequently mentions Cortijo y su Combo and, especially, their vocalist Ismael Rivera as one of his major influences (Personal Communication 2/29/08; e.g. of media interviews see Byron 2005; Pagán Sánchez 2003a). Tego Calderón often praises Rafael Cortijo and Ismael Rivera for their impact on Puerto Rican popular music as well as their overtly anti-racist stance (Personal Communication 2/29/08; Byron 2005; Pagán Sánchez 2003a). The lyrics and themes of Cortijo’s songs reflected the lives and musical aesthetics of the historically black community of Santurce (Berríos-Miranda and Dudley 2008; J. Flores 2004:2).<sup>19</sup> Indeed, racism in Puerto Rico became one of the major societal issues addressed by Cortijo y su Combo, evident in hits like “*El Negro Bombón*,” about a young black man in Puerto Rico killed for having “big lips.” Some of their songs also described racism elsewhere. For example, “*El Negrito de Alabama*” tells the story of an African American man in Alabama who has been lynched for marrying a white woman. Taken together, songs like “*El Negro Bombón*” and “*El Negrito de Alabama*,” along with many other compositions by Cortijo y su Combo, serve as recognitions of the comparable experiences of racial exclusion among black communities in Puerto Rico and elsewhere in the African diaspora. Like contemporary reggaetón, Cortijo y su Combo made important critiques of the dominant discourses of racial democracy that stigmatized blackness in Puerto Rico, and in the process created new ways of understanding blackness that relied in part on diasporic links with other sites of the African diaspora.

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<sup>18</sup> Indeed, following the break up of Cortijo y su Combo, several of the musicians, led by pianist Rafael Ithier, formed a new band called El Gran Combo de Puerto Rico, one of the most internationally successful salsa ensembles of the past fifty years (Berríos-Miranda and Dudley 2008).

<sup>19</sup> Despite their “mainstream” success and international popularity, Cortijo and Rivera are commonly associated with the communities from which they came, especially the neighborhood Santurce (Berríos-Miranda and Dudley 2008). Historically, Santurce had been home to large working class black communities, including immigrants from other Caribbean islands (Berríos-Miranda and Dudley 2008). Cortijo y su Combo emerged after significant urban migration to neighborhoods like Santurce took place in the 1930s and 1940s, and during a time when Santurce developed as a large urban center (Berríos-Miranda and Dudley 2008). Throughout its transformation, however, Santurce continued to be recognized as predominantly black, working class community (Berríos-Miranda and Dudley 2008). Although developed during different times, both Cortijo y su Combo and reggaetón reveal the audible entanglements associated with the ever-changing relationships between race, class, and place in Puerto Rico’s cultural topography.

Consequently, Tego Calderón claims that Cortijo y su Combo “*cuenta la historia de Puerto Rico... bien diferente de como la puede contar un libro*” [tells the history of Puerto Rico much differently than what you can find in a book] (Personal Communication 2/29/08). Cortijo y su Combo’s interventions in developing alternative definitions of blackness in Puerto Rico was made possible by the group’s tremendous popularity both on the island and internationally rather than any governmental institutionalization that recognized them as national icons. Tego Calderón notes that Rafael Cortijo

*no se le daba el honradez a Señor Cortijo pa’ un marquis, celebrar el Día Nacional de la Salsa.<sup>20</sup> Nunca lo ha dedicado al Señor Rafael Cortijo, no sé cómo. Lo se ha dedicado a gente de Nueva York, gente que no son de Puerto Rico y todavía al papá de lo que sea hoy, lo que conozca como salsa, de música popular latina, no se da celebrar y creo que es una cosita que, pues, yo no digo que tiene que ser racismo, me entiende...quizá es varios factores que han impedido* (Personal Communication 2/29/08).

[They have not given Mr. Cortijo the honor of a marquis, or of celebrating the National Day of Salsa. They have never dedicated it to Mr. Rafael Cortijo, I don’t know how. They have dedicated it to people from New York, people who are not from Puerto Rico, and still they haven’t celebrated the father of what is today, what is known today as salsa, the Latin American popular music. And I think that its something that, well, I wouldn’t say that it has to be racism, you know...maybe its many different factors that have impeded this.]

Although Calderón is reluctant to name racism the primary cause for this lack of recognition, scholar Juan Flores (1993) has argued that Cortijo’s overt expressions of a working class Afro-Puerto Rican sensibility have prevented the institutional recognition of him as a national artist. In 1988, a suggestion to name the Centro de Bellas Artes [Center for Fine Arts] in San Juan after Rafael Cortijo was met with much criticism by Puerto Rican elites who considered his music too “vulgar” for an institution dedicated to “fine art” (J. Flores 1993:95). Juan Flores (1993) has argued that the debates surrounding the naming of the Centro de Bellas Artes after Cortijo reflect broader racial and class biases in Puerto Rico that routinely devalue black working class communities. For Flores (1993), the popularity of Cortijo’s music that integrated musical sounds and lyrical themes associated with working class Afro-Puerto Ricans threatened the foundations of elite, Hispanophilic conceptions of Puerto Rican identity. The debates surrounding the naming of the Centro de Bellas Artes ultimately reflects the potential of Afro-Puerto Rican musical traditions to counter hegemonic discourses of racial democracy in Puerto Rico.

There are many similarities between the music, biographies, and celebrities of Rafael Cortijo, Ismael Rivera and Tego Calderón. Indeed, both Calderón and the Puerto Rican media frequently make comparisons between him and Ismael Rivera based on musical style and lyrical themes (e.g. see Pagán Sánchez 2003b; Pérez Ramírez 2006). Such comparisons often establish Calderón as a more contemporary version of Ismael Rivera and, to a lesser extent, Rafael Cortijo. In their music, Cortijo y su Combo and Tego Calderón incorporate diasporic resources into their

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<sup>20</sup> The *Día Nacional de la Salsa* is an annual festival celebrating the career of a renowned salsa artist featuring homage performances by other popular singers. In fact, Tego Calderón was the first reggaetón artist to be featured in the *Día Nacional de la Salsa*, performing a duet with honored *salsero* Tommy Olivencia in 2005.

descriptions of the everyday lives of Afro-Puerto Rican communities on the island. Although many of the circumstances impacting working class and black communities in Puerto Rico have changed since Cortijo y su Combo performed in the 1950s and 1960s, they made significant contributions to the cultural politics of blackness in Puerto Rico, and are important precursors to the music of Tego Calderón.

### “A Black Boricua”: Calderón’s Diasporic Interventions

Similar to the ways that Cortijo y su Combo used the Cuban arrangements popular during their time to promote alternative definitions of Afro-Puerto Rican identities, reggaetón provides a platform for Calderón to express similar ideas about blackness on a national stage in contemporary Puerto Rican society. Initially, Calderón disliked reggaetón, considering it an imitation of Jamaican dancehall (Personal Communication 2/29/08; R. Rivera 2004:276). Rather, Calderón preferred hip hop from the United States, Puerto Rican underground, and salsa by 1960s groups such as Cortijo y su Combo because he thought they were more “political” and original than reggaetón (Pérez Ramírez 2006). Still, he realized that reggaetón was the most popular music on the island at the time, and chose to “experiment” with the genre (Pagán Sánchez 2002b; R. Rivera 2004:276). The result was a fusion of reggaetón with other musical genres ranging from rap to bomba to salsa to roots reggae.

Beyond the musical fusions, however, Tego Calderón’s music also produces new interpretations of the particular entanglements of race and place that inform dominant discourses of racial democracy. Jocelyne Guilbault’s (2005) analytic “audible entanglements” offers a way of reading Calderón’s musical fusions as not “merely musical,” but also generative of alternative ways of imagining blackness that dispute the dominant images of blackness as folkloric and blackness as abject circulating in Puerto Rico. Guilbault identifies audible entanglements as situated practices that “foresound” social relations. Audible entanglements require that popular music be taken seriously as constitutive of new identities and social relationships. Reading these audible entanglements in Calderón’s music illustrates how he utilizes reggaetón to insert critical redefinitions of blackness as simultaneously diasporic and uniquely Puerto Rican into Puerto Rican society.

Calderón considers his music to be informed by his own personal identity as an Afro-Puerto Rican and his participation in an African diasporic space. In an interview with *Source Latino*, Calderón responded to a question regarding his musical sound with a discussion of the connections between Puerto Rican music and rap more generally:

**Source Latino:** You are the only one that has fully taken the *negroide* sound from Loíza, Puerto Rico, together with rap. How did you come up with that idea?

**Tego Calderón:** *Yo creo que el éxito mío fue mantenerme como quien soy. Yo nunca he tratado de ser negro americano, a pesar de que respeto y admiro la cultura de los afroamericanos. Me han enseñado mucho, pero yo no soy un negro americano, yo no crecí oyendo a Marvin Gaye, yo crecí escuchando a Ismael Rivera y Héctor Lavoe y al Chamaco Rodríguez...Es lo que yo soy, lo que a mí me gusta es Muñequitos de*



*Matanzas*<sup>21</sup>, *la bomba boricua, cosas de nosotros...lo que yo soy es lo que soy, un negro boricua* (qtd. in Byron 2005:64).

[I believe that my success came from staying who I am. I have never tried to be a black American, even though I admire and respect African American culture. They have taught me a lot, but I'm not a black American, I did not grow up listening to Marvin Gaye, I grew up listening to Ismael Rivera and Héctor Lavoe and Chamaco Rodríguez...Its what I am, what I like is Muñequitos de Matanzas, Puerto Rican bomba, our things...what I am is what I am, a black Boricua.]

Rather than the insular, folkloric blackness associated with elitist constructions of racial democracy, Calderón's "black Boricua" identity is informed by Puerto Rico's connections to the African diaspora, particularly via the influence of African American culture on his personal development. Calderón's music reflects his commitment to local Puerto Rican musicians and traditions as well as recognition of diasporic connections between Puerto Rico and other sites of the diaspora.

Indeed, Calderón's music is often represented as an expression of a uniquely diasporic Afro-Puerto Rican identity. For example, in his second album, *The Underdog/El Subestimado*, Calderón includes liner notes written by Afro-Puerto Rican scholar and activist Mayra Santos Febres. Throughout the liner notes, Santos Febres describes the album as an expression of "Tegología," or "Tegology," which she defines as "Tego's philosophy." She emphasizes Calderón's "realness" and his devotion to his "people"—the "underdogs" in poor communities, Puerto Rico, and the African diaspora. Santos Febres (2006) outlines the social and musical connections between Calderón's record and other African diasporic communities, stemming partly from similar circumstances as working class racialized subjects. She describes the song "Mardi Gras" as a story about a group of individuals dancing and having fun at a party. Despite this seemingly "apolitical" emphasis, Santos Febres (2006) writes that the song is meant to "unit[e] all black people throughout the diaspora. Puerto Rico, the Caribbean, Louisiana, is [*sic*] all the same. Music and the ability to laugh in the face of bad times makes [*sic*] us family. Wine/perrea [*sic*]. Blues/sandunгаа [*sic*]." <sup>22</sup> Combined with the musical elements of Calderón's recordings, such descriptions of his songs emphasize the diasporic connections embedded within his articulations of distinct Afro-Puerto Rican identities.

Individual songs in Calderón's repertoire more explicitly reveal the infusion of diasporic resources and local musical practices in Calderón's alternative definitions of Afro-Puerto Rican identity. "Chango Blanco," included on his second album, *The Underdog/El Subestimado* (2006), mirrors some of the musical and rhetorical strategies employed by Cortijo y su Combo. "Chango Blanco" is a salsa song with musical arrangements reminiscent of those by Cortijo y su Combo. The localized musical style of "Chango Blanco" combines with lyrical themes that concern issues fundamental to diaspora, especially the process of "revelation" that Percy

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<sup>21</sup> Muñequitos de Matanzas are a rumba group from Cuba. Rumba and bomba are different musical genres, although they have several similarities in their structure and performance. Although Muñequitos de Matanzas are not Puerto Rican, I believe that this quote shows the similarities between musical and cultural similarities between bomba and rumba as well as Calderón's recognition of the African diasporic connections between the two countries.

<sup>22</sup> "Wine" refers to a popular dance in the Caribbean that is very similar to *perreo*. "Blues" refers to a popular music from the southern United States, and "sandunгаа" [*sic*] means "party" or "beat" in Puerto Rico.

Hintzen, Jean Rahier, and Felipe Smith (2010) describe as an important moment in articulating diasporic connections. The song tells the story of a crow that has been painted white, becoming unrecognizable when he flies amongst his friends. A sudden rain shower washes the paint off of the crow. The other crows then recognize him and welcome him back into their community. At that point, the crow realizes that he wants to stay black because black is beautiful. The song's message is ultimately revealed in its chorus, "*Yo me quiero quedar negrito/Nací con este color/Yes que me queda bonito*" [I want to stay black/I was born with this color/And it looks good on me].<sup>23</sup> Through this "fable," "Chango Blanco" rejects the portrayal of blackness as the "underside" of Western modernity.

Calderón chose to record the song not only because of his love of salsa, but also because he felt that "Chango Blanco" provided an important message "*porque la base es la raza negra*" [because the base is the black race] and the song could help "*educar a la gente poco a poco*" [educate the people little by little] (qtd. in Tirado 2006c). Indeed, Calderón considers popular culture more generally as an effective tool for the dissemination of alternative ideas about blackness that counter dominant portrayals of blackness as "primitive" or "abject." In the case of Puerto Rico, Tego Calderón stated, "*con el tiempo, pues, sigue educando poco a poco con canciones como "Chango Blanco," con cantas, con películas en el futuro, y podemos nosotros tomar un, unos papeles más escalados en nuestra propia historia, en escribirla, y en proyectarla y en hacer nuestro punto de vista*" [with time, well, you can keep educating people little by little with songs like "Chango Blanco," with folktales, with movies in the future, and we [Afro-Puerto Ricans] can take greater roles in our own history, in writing it, in projecting it, and in making our point of view known] (Personal Communication 2/29/08). Similar to his arguments regarding the significance of Cortijo y su Combo retelling a history that is omitted from textbooks, Calderón thus sees his music as part of a larger "educational" project that produces alternative images of blackness that refute the modern racial hierarchies within dominant constructions of racial democracy.

In addition to the salsa of Cortijo y su Combo, Calderón also draws from bomba as a local musical practice in creating his reggaetón. Although many music critics and fans interpret Calderón's inclusion of bomba in his music as evidence of his position as a more "national" artist than other reggaetón singers, Calderón's incorporation of bomba can also be considered a move that yields new definitions of Afro-Puerto Rican identities. For example, Calderón's fusions of bomba with reggaetón contradicts the dominant portrayal of bomba as a static, folkloric practice, instead positioning the music as relevant to the contemporary circumstances impacting Afro-Puerto Rican communities. Calderón's appearance on *My Block: Puerto Rico* highlights this redefinition of bomba as a modern practice. The segment includes a discussion of bomba as an "African" cultural practice that exists throughout Puerto Rico. A young boy teaches MTV host Sway some basic steps, which Sway enthusiastically learns in order to "get in touch with [his] African roots." On the one hand, the portrayal of bomba's "Africanness" seems to comply with the dominant narrative of bomba as an antiquated practice that was directly transplanted from

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<sup>23</sup> It is worth noting that this "black is beautiful" refrain is reminiscent of "*Las Caras Lindas*" [The Beautiful Faces], a song about the beauty of the black community in Puerto Rico written by Tite Curet Alonso and recorded by Ismael Rivera in 1978. The song is often recognized in Latin America as a celebration of Afro-Latino pride. Although not performed by Cortijo y su Combo, the thematic links between "Chango Blanco" and "*Las Caras Lindas*" further serve to connect Tego Calderón with the iconic figure of Ismael Rivera in the popular imagination.

Africa. At the same time, however, visuals accompanying the segment feature young dancers dressed in the latest hip hop and reggaetón fashions. Instead of the white uniforms that accompany nationally institutionalized representations of bomba, the images of young male dancers with backwards baseball caps, long t-shirts, jean shorts and Nike sneakers included in the MTV special align more with the stereotypical images of reggaetón male fans. And yet, these images also depart from the stereotypical portrayal of reggaetón fans as inherently criminal and hypersexual. Rather, the dancers featured on *My Block: Puerto Rico* can be interpreted to represent an alternative blackness that combines diasporic resources (evident in their “hip hop” styles of dress) and local Afro-Puerto Rican signifiers (e.g. bomba).

The *bombazo*<sup>24</sup> scene in *My Block: Puerto Rico* also goes against the strict boundaries that enplace folkloric blackness within Loíza. In dominant portrayals of Loíza, the town’s isolation and underdevelopment is depicted as a “natural” occurrence that resulted from the maintenance of “African” traditions and lifestyles (see Alegria 1954). Such descriptions of Loíza emphasize its “pre-modern” status vis-à-vis the rest of the island, and, in the process, relegate folkloric blackness to the past. However, in *My Block: Puerto Rico*, Calderón depicts Loíza’s isolation as the result of racist and classist policies that maintain racial hierarchies. Calderón’s statements in the interview such as “We are in a place where not even Puerto Ricans come” and “It has been hard for Loíza forever” imply that the socioeconomic conditions impacting Loíza are rooted in structural rather than “natural” causes. Consequently, the interview revises dominant entanglements of race and place, producing an image of Loíza as modern and resistive to the static, folkloric blackness that hegemonic discourses of racial democracy attribute to the town.

Indeed, like bomba, the town of Loíza also serves as a critical signifier of Afro-Puerto Rican identity to which Calderón frequently refers. As evinced in his segment on *My Block: Puerto Rico*, Calderón often emphasizes the impact of racism on the town. Calderón’s song “Loíza” included on his album *El Abyarde* uses the town as a metaphor to comment on the persistence of racism in Puerto Rican society. “Loíza” features Calderón’s rapid vocals over a bomba-laced hip hop beat; once again, these fusions of bomba together with rap and reggaetón signify a shift in the recognition of bomba from a folkloric, historical practice to a contemporary music. Apart from the title, Calderón rarely mentions Loíza in the song. Rather, the town represents blackness on the island more generally. Throughout the song, Calderón discusses the prevalence of classism and racism in Puerto Rican institutions. He describes the injustices of the criminal justice system, the inadequate educational system, and general corruption among Puerto Rico’s politicians and elite. While Calderón criticizes colonialism (especially from Spain), he also admonishes the Puerto Rican Independence Party for not adequately addressing the problems facing the Afro-Puerto Rican community. “Loíza” thus portrays the Afro-Puerto Rican community as “forgotten” by Puerto Rican elites and institutions affiliated with all political parties on the island. In addition, Calderón positions himself as an outsider within Puerto Rico as a result of his blackness. As the chorus states:

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<sup>24</sup> *Bombazo* refers to a gathering where people perform bomba.

*Con que potestad  
Va a quitarme la libertad  
Si yo no reconozco  
Su autoridad*

With what authority  
Are you going to take away my liberty  
If I don't recognize  
Your authority.

*Con que potestad  
Va a quitarme la libertad  
Si yo no pertenezco  
A su sociedad.*

With what authority  
Are you going to take away my liberty  
If I don't belong  
To your society

Here, the issue of belonging becomes critically important. Calderón exposes the fact that, despite racial democracy's inclusive rhetoric, he is prevented from fully belonging in Puerto Rican society. Calderón thus physically locates himself in Puerto Rico, but asserts that he belongs to another space besides that which is structured by elitist discourses of racial democracy.

This new space is intimately tied to diaspora, offering an alternative way to imagine blackness. In this sense, the "Loíza" in the song may also be interpreted as a figurative space that both recognizes and celebrates the humanity of blackness. As Calderón raps in later verses,

*Yo no tengo na'  
Sólo esta letra encabroná  
Y la capacidad  
De no creer en tu verdad...  
Yo soy niche,  
Orgullosos de mis raíces  
De tener mucha bamba  
Y grandes narices.*

I don't have anything  
But these pissed off lyrics  
And the capacity  
To not believe in your truth...  
I'm a black man,  
Proud of my roots,  
Of having big lips,  
And a big nose.

The "capacity" to reject the "truth" of dominant constructions of racial democracy allows Calderón to celebrate blackness when he describes his "roots" and his appearance. Therefore, the "Loíza" in Calderón's song offers an alternative space that enables Calderón to reconstitute blackness in new ways that debunk racial democracy discourses in Puerto Rico. Indeed, the reference to specific Puerto Rican cultural practices and icons throughout the song situate the metaphorical space of Loíza within the island's cultural topography.<sup>25</sup> "Loíza" thus provides a critical commentary that refutes the modern racial hierarchies inherent to hegemonic discourses of racial democracy by articulating a new understanding of blackness.

The audible entanglements embedded within Calderón's music and performance thus celebrate Afro-Puerto Rican culture and its multiple musical and sociopolitical African diasporic connections. Although the popular associations between Tego Calderón's image and music with commonly recognized Afro-Puerto Rican icons and cultural practices causes even many of the

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<sup>25</sup> In addition to incorporating bomba and titling the song Loíza, other Puerto Rican icons and signifiers are mentioned throughout the song. For example, Calderón's critiques of the Puerto Rican Independence Party identify Rubén Berríos, the leader of the party. He also mentions Vieques, an island off of the coast of Puerto Rico that was used by the U.S. military test weapons such as bombs and missiles. After several protests on the island and in the United States, the U.S. Navy finally withdrew in 2003.

staunchest reggaetón critics to embrace him as a “Puerto Rican” artist, his sense of belonging in the African diaspora enables Calderón to transform these same cultural practices in order to interpolate alternative understandings of blackness into the Puerto Rican mainstream. These new understandings of blackness are at once local due to their reliance on Afro-Puerto Rican signifiers such as bomba, and diasporic because of their insistence on adapting diasporic resources, particularly from African American culture, to the Afro-Puerto Rican experience. To that end, the blackness expressed in Calderón’s music directly refutes the dominant images of blackness as abject and folkloric that maintain hegemonic discourses of racial democracy.

## Conclusion

In 2006, Tego Calderón participated in a VH1 special entitled *Bling: A Planet Rock*. Along with U.S. rappers Paul Wall and Raekwon, as well as former child soldier and activist Ishmael Beah, Calderón traveled to Sierra Leone to investigate the impact of the illegal diamond trade on the country. The trip greatly affected Calderón, making him more “aware” of the impact of capitalism and colonialism on different parts of the world (*LatinHop* 2006; Pérez Ramírez 2006). In addition to discussing specifics of the diamond trade, Calderón mentioned the similarities he saw between Loíza and the places he visited in Africa in one interview with Puerto Rican newspaper *El Nuevo Día*: “*No me siento extranjero, sino que estoy en Piñones<sup>26</sup>, en Loíza: las mismas caras, los mismos sufrimientos, pero diferentes países*” [I don’t feel like a foreigner [in Africa], but rather that I am in Piñones, in Loíza: the same faces, the same suffering, but different countries] (qtd. in Pérez Ramírez 2006). While hegemonic depictions of the relationship between Africa and Puerto Rico describe Africa as a distant, “pre-modern” place that influenced the development of Puerto Rican culture, Calderón’s reference to the “same faces” and “same suffering” of *loiceños* and Africans emphasizes the comparable effects that capitalism, colonialism, and poverty has produced in black communities in different sites of the African diaspora.

Just as with his music, Calderón’s statements underscore the diasporic connections between Puerto Rico and elsewhere in the African diaspora. Such commentaries reveal the process of “mutual recognition” that generates not only cultural similarities across diasporic sites, but also social, economic, and political ones. For Calderón, establishing these diasporic connections highlights the contradictions within dominant discourses of racial democracy, especially the co-existence of racism with the assumptions that Puerto Rico is a racially harmonious society. Ironically, however, many of the same signifiers of blackness that have been used as evidence of the exclusively “folkloric” idea of blackness that comply with dominant constructions of racial democracy have also been associated with Calderón in the popular imagination and, in turn, enabled Calderón to be positioned as a uniquely Puerto Rican reggaetón artist.

Indeed, Tego Calderón embraces a distinctly Afro-Puerto Rican identity; however, as his writings and music suggest, Calderón’s Puerto Rican identity involves both local and diasporic

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<sup>26</sup> Piñones is a town bordering Loíza, and popularly considered to be concentrated with Afro-Puerto Rican life and culture. Due to their geographic proximity, many Puerto Ricans refer to them together.

signifiers of blackness. His revisions of the narratives surrounding Afro-Puerto Rican cultural practices and his frequent citing of musical influences such as Cortijo y su Combo exemplify Calderón's positioning as a local Puerto Rican artist. Moreover, Calderón's music reveals his commitment to creating a more egalitarian Puerto Rican society with equal rights for Afro-Puerto Rican citizens. Despite their local orientation, these new understandings of Afro-Puerto Rican identity also depend on African diasporic connections. Because of his engagement with an African diasporic space, Calderón draws from diasporic resources such as musical influences, political icons and movements, and comparable histories of racial violence and exclusion from other sites of the African diaspora, particularly the United States, in order to envision a blackness that departs from its depiction as the "primitive" counterpoint to whiteness. In the process, Calderón disrupts the insular emplacements of blackness that pervade Puerto Rico's cultural topography, and uses reggaetón to express new entanglements of race, place, and diasporic space. An analysis of Tego Calderón's music and celebrity illuminates the possibilities that reggaetón offers for challenging the dominant constructions of racial democracy and for developing alternative constructions of not only blackness, but also Puerto Rican identity more generally. To that end, Tego Calderón's particular vision of Puerto Rican identity calls for racial democracy to finally realize its promise of full equality for all of the island's citizens.

## Chapter Seven: Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have argued that reggaetón artists and fans participate in an African diasporic space that enables them to express alternative understandings of blackness that refute the Eurocentric bias intrinsic to dominant constructions of racial democracy in Puerto Rico. Furthermore, I have shown how the various censorship campaigns and intense backlash against reggaetón ultimately expose deeper concerns regarding the definition of Puerto Rican national identity. Indeed, as I described in Chapter Two, racial democracy discourses were developed in part to assuage the anxieties of Puerto Rican elites concerned about the maintenance of a unique Puerto Rican culture in the face of the rapid “Americanization” of the island. Not only did the dominant construction of racial democracy distinguish Puerto Rico from the United States, for some authors such as Tomás Blanco (1942), the discourse also provided evidence of Puerto Rican moral superiority to the United States, thus discrediting the persistence of colonialism on the island. At the same time, this development of Puerto Rican national identity did not compromise the persistence of white privilege, but rather portrayed Puerto Ricans as “Spanish” people with relatively limited influence from African or indigenous ancestors.

In Chapter Three, I revealed how multiple and often contradictory emplacements of blackness in Puerto Rico have maintained the hegemony of racial democracy discourses. Certain emplacements, such as the folkloric blackness associated with Loíza, comprise officially sanctioned signifiers of Puerto Rico’s African heritage, but do so in ways that further relegate blackness in the past. On the other hand, emplacements of blackness such as the abject blackness of *caseríos*, or the foreign blackness of Dominican communities, represent the counterpoint to the presumably more “white” Puerto Rican subject. These various emplacements of blackness are assumed to “authenticate” the different archetypes of blackness that circulate in Puerto Rico and, in the process, reinforce racial democracy discourses. However, my discussion of emplacements of blackness also reveals how the distinct entanglements of race and place in Puerto Rico brings to light some of the contradictions inherent to discourses of racial democracy. Consequently, exposing such contradictions illuminates the possibilities that exist within racial democracy discourse to articulate alternative constructions of blackness.

Indeed, place is particularly important in the history of reggaetón. For some scholars, reggaetón’s development belies any allegiance to a specific place (e.g. see J. Flores 2009b). Such arguments point to the multiple musical influences from Panama, Jamaica, New York, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic, among other places, that have informed reggaetón. While I acknowledge the important contributions of these communities in reggaetón’s development, I agree with Raquel Z. Rivera, Wayne Marshall, and Deborah Pacini Hernández’s (2009) claims that reggaetón was specifically “reshaped by urban Puerto Rican sensibilities” (8). I argue that reggaetón emerged in part as a response to the particular moment when the *Mano Dura Contra el Crimen* campaign attempted to cement the emplacement of abject blackness in *caseríos*. Therefore, I focus Chapter Four on the lyrics and experiences of underground artists in the 1990s who articulated understandings of blackness that countered dominant representations of their communities as emplacements of abject blackness. In this context, I contend that musical practices such as hip hop from the United States and *reggae en español* from Panama provided critical diasporic resources that Puerto Rican youth integrated into their new configurations of Afro-Puerto Rican identity.

These alternative expressions of blackness were met with intense resistance by Puerto Rican elites who attempted to maintain the whitening bias within hegemonic discourses of racial democracy. In Chapters Four and Five, I demonstrate how censorship campaigns against reggaetón asserted racial democracy discourses as the basis of Puerto Rican identity. In the 1990s, critics of underground described the music as “immoral” and “foreign,” attributing underground artists and fans with certain tropes of abject blackness that positioned them as the constitutive outside of Puerto Rican society. Then, in 2002, the Puerto Rican Senate portrayed expressions of black female sexuality in reggaetón as a moral threat to Puerto Rican society and the maintenance of racial democracy discourses. Significantly, however, this Anti-Pornography Campaign sought to accommodate reggaetón into racial democracy discourses by emphasizing blackness as a “manageable” influence in Puerto Rican society. In other words, the Anti-Pornography Campaign sought to “refine” *perreo*, bringing the dance within the “respectability” that supposedly defined Puerto Rican female identity while acknowledging reggaetón’s blackness as an “unfortunate” consequence of historical processes of race mixture.

I highlight these censorship campaigns in part to reveal the ways that reggaetón’s new articulations of black identities were perceived as threatening to dominant constructions of Puerto Rican identity. However, such challenges to the elitist and Hispanophilic images of Puerto Rican identity are not new. For example, popular music genres such as salsa served as spaces where earlier generations of Puerto Ricans could express their affiliations with other African diasporic communities. In Chapter Six, I show how popular reggaetón artist Tego Calderón builds from these musical traditions, combining local and diasporic signifiers of blackness to create a new vision of Afro-Puerto Rican identity. Calderón’s associations with these popularly recognized signifiers of blackness has motivated Puerto Rican elites to distinguish Calderón as a uniquely “Puerto Rican” reggaetón artist. Calderón’s success has therefore provided him a platform to voice his concerns regarding the persistence of racism in Puerto Rico and elsewhere in Latin America. Consequently, Calderón has used reggaetón to insist that “racial democracy” live up to its promise of racial equality in Puerto Rico.

Overall, this dissertation speaks to multiple bodies of literature, including diaspora theory, studies of race in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the burgeoning scholarship on reggaetón. Much work remains to be done in examining race relations in Puerto Rico. This research requires an innovative interdisciplinary methodology that not only relies on multiple sources, but also does not take for granted classifications such as “black,” “white,” or even “Puerto Rican” as given, stable categories. Rather, as I have attempted to do in this dissertation, researching race in Puerto Rico and elsewhere in Latin America necessitates a nuanced approach that interrogates the specific inclusions and exclusions present in the constructions of national identities, even when these identities are defined by discourses of hybridity. Paying special attention to everyday cultural practices such as reggaetón that enable individuals to engage in an African diasporic space will shed light on some of the inconsistencies embedded within these hegemonic discourses of hybridity.

There is also much work to be done about reggaetón. In this dissertation, I seek to contribute to reggaetón scholarship by focusing on the particular race-based politics and African diasporic orientation within the music. More scholarship is needed about reggaetón’s relationship to other Puerto Rican musical traditions, and the development of reggaetón scenes in countries such as Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and the mainland United States. Indeed, future



research regarding how U.S. Latinos relate to reggaetón may provide valuable contributions to understandings of blackness and Afro-Latinidad in these communities. At the same time, scholarship about the more problematic aspects of reggaetón is also necessary. Nuanced discussions of representations of gender and sexuality, for example, is critical for understanding reggaetón's role in society, and the intersections of gender, race, and national identity in Puerto Rico more generally. Reggaetón is one of the most popular music genres in the Americas, and critical scholarship about reggaetón will add to our understandings of race, gender, migration, diaspora, national identity, and other issues throughout the region.

Since 2006, record companies have reported that reggaetón's sales have greatly decreased, and critics have surmised that reggaetón will soon reach its demise (Pacini Hernández 2010:161). Likewise, many critics of the music claim that reggaetón artists are "sell-outs" who have forgotten their roots. Reggaetón has certainly transformed since its early days as underground. Artists such as Daddy Yankee, Ivy Queen, Wisin y Yandel, and Don Omar have recorded songs in other musical genres such as bachata, salsa, house, and pop. At the same time, Latin pop artists such as Shakira or RBD have recorded their own versions of reggaetón hits. Furthermore, new fusions of reggaetón with other genres such as "salsaton" (salsa plus reggaetón), "bachaton" (bachata with reggaetón) and even bhangraton (bhangra and reggaetón) have emerged in recent years, revealing the global reach of reggaetón. These musical shifts represent a stark departure from the more basic underground recordings of the 1980s and 1990s. Still, one cannot dismiss reggaetón as merely a "fad" because, for many fans and artists, the music continues to provide a space where they can negotiate the particular race, gender, class, and national identities that inform their realities. Whether it is the young woman who sees dancing *perreo* as an opportunity to express her sexuality, or the young man who considers his *trenzas* a symbol of Puerto Rico's Afro-Caribbean connections, reggaetón remains an important site where marginalized youth in Puerto Rico and elsewhere participate in an African diasporic space. Through this recognition of the similar circumstances impacting other African diasporic communities, reggaetón fans and artists create new possibilities of imagining blackness that discredit the dominant constructions of blackness that circulate in Puerto Rico. In the process, reggaetón offers the opportunity to create more inclusive definitions of Puerto Rican identity that insist upon full citizenship for working class Puerto Ricans, Afro-Puerto Ricans, Nuyoricans, Dominican migrants, and others living on the island.

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