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## **The Geographical Imagination: The Ontology of Race, Memory, and Place in the Identity Debate in Puerto Rico, 1849–1950 (An interpretative Essay)**

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During a multi-century long process of delving into the very notion of what makes Puerto Ricans what they are the ontological quest has directed intellectual inquiries down a diverse array of paths. However, I would argue that in general the quests have dealt with three categories: a) selfhood, b) memory, and c) place. I would argue further that those categories are central when analyzing identity formation processes. This procedural view of identity formation is based on the notions laid out by Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre who saw the self not only as being-in-itself in a metaphysical sense, but by being-in-itself as being-in-the-world, in the phenomenological-existential sense. For the purpose of this paper, Identity formation will be seen as an existential procedural experience as a contingent, dialectical, heteroglotic, and inter-subjective process. However, I see such process having a built-in *geographical imagination*. Identity formation, I would argue, is a process that happens in a place, or places. Place – that being-in-the-world – in itself, is part of the existential experience as it pertains to the self-in-itself. Consequently, identity formation, as an existential experience, is not only procedural but also simultaneously [heteroglotically] a referential one.

During the century between 1849 and 1950, the identity formation process is seen by Puerto Rican intellectuals as a reflexive one: the coming to age of Spaniards born in the Island and their arrival to a new level of identity and consciousness as being Puerto Ricans. The aboriginal nations and the kidnapped Africans brought to the island are construed and constructed as absorbed by the European civilization. These Criollos [white creoles] constructed and reified their views in a discursive gaze that placed their identity as an evolutionary offshoot of European culture. Everything outside that cultural framework was seen as meaningless unless it came into contact with western history.

The notions of race, memory and place are treated as ontological categories because they are faces of the prism that makes intelligible the identity being defined. Reference to the Identity, to the self, is fixed on inclusion-exclusion seesaw like arguments, is framed by a specific history [memory], and is embedded in a precise geographical site [place]. For instance, Manuel Alonso writing about traditional dances in Puerto Rico in 1849, wrote,

In Puerto Rico two dance styles exist: those of high society, which are nothing more than echoes from Europe; and the others, called *de garabato*, which are from the Island proper, although, in my opinion they are a mix of those of the Spaniards and the Island's primitive inhabitants. We know dances from Africa, as well, introduced by the Negroes from those regions; however, those dances are not found widespread across the Island. They are called *bailes de bomba* [bomba

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dances], because of the instrument used by the Negroes to play the music.<sup>1</sup>

In this paragraph mid nineteenth century traditional dances in Puerto Rico are racialized [Spaniard – African]; they are considered to have a built in memory [being “nothing more than echoes from Europe”], and a precise geography [Europe – Africa].

Almost a hundred years later, a young music professor from the University of Puerto Rico, Augusto Rodríguez expanded upon that same idea, writing that:

The life of our folklore springs, without a doubt, from Spain; our Aguinaldos, cradlesongs, seises, décimas, coplas, and other artistic expressions are musical modes transplanted from Andalucía, Castilla, Galicia, Asturias. The unhappy Carib Indians, mercilessly killed during the 16th century, did not leave even a drop of musical blood. The imported Negro abandoned the rhythm inherited from African tribes: voodoo, ñañiguismo, witchcraft, dance, bembé, and so forth; with startling ease he embraced the Catholic religion. Escaping from his own reality, the Negro looked for refuge in a false sense of security; ... betrayed by himself, he stopped being a Negro; longed to become lighter, and became, then, a romantic Negro. In that way the essence of our racial plenitude was wasted. Whatever is left of the Negro in our folklore is generously borrowed from our Cuban brothers and our Haitian brothers.<sup>2</sup>

In both instances, in Alonso and then in Rodríguez, Puerto Rican identity is clearly mapped. Its historicity had a precise starting point: 1492, the European arrival and conquest. Its essence is Spanish. Its geography bounded to the coordinate of the European culture. Everything else is the “island’s primitive inhabitants,” and the “Negroes from the regions” of Africa, for Alonso, and the “generously borrowed from our Cuban brothers and our Haitian brothers,” for Rodríguez. The discourse of being Puerto Rican, the self and sense of Puerto Rican-hood, not only outlined identity by genealogy but also by geography. At the center of being Puerto Rican is to be of Spanish stock –by genetic or cultural genealogy– and any presence of African derived practices are marginal and its substance is only, as Rodríguez argued, “being generously borrowed from our Cuban brothers and our Haitian brothers.” For these two authors, in the process of identity formation and identification, the Empire defines the center, and the Caribbean frames the external boundary of that identity, which makes it more salient.

In this paper the term *geographical imagination* has a twofold meaning. First, it is a network of ideas, idealizations, and views that in dynamic and adaptive ways allow us to create a mental map, or geography, which organizes, fixes, and sets categories. Second, it is a discursive device that names, labels, and identifies essentialized views of human behavior as related with a geographical point or region; it is explored as those discursive devices and strategies through which imagination shapes notions and understandings of race, memory, and place. Alonso and Rodríguez’s views, although a century apart, established a genealogical line not only as to how

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<sup>1</sup> . Alonso, Manuel, *El gibaro: cuadro de costumbres de la isla de Puerto Rico*. Facsimile publication of the first edition: 1849. San Juan: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1970. p. 58. [As translated by Noel Allende-Goitía]

<sup>2</sup> *Problemas de la cultura en Puerto Rico: Foro del Ateneo Puertorriqueño, 1940*. Augusto Rodríguez, "La música," pp. 78-79. [As translated by Noel Allende-Goitía]

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the Puerto Rican Criollo created an ideological and ideographical link between the Island and Spain, but also as to how that same view positioned Puerto Rico in a particular way within the Greater Caribbean region.

Manuel Alonso's book, *El Gibaro* [The Peasant], published in 1849, was part of a trilogy of books published by Puerto Rican Criollos in Spain and Puerto Rico. The others were *Album puertorriqueño* (1844) and *Cancionero de Borinquen* (1846). This generation was marked by the events that lead to the eventual independence of the Latin American countries and Haiti. For this generation insurgency and slave revolt were two sides of the same coin. Between 1800 and 1833, the peninsular authorities in the Island were always complaining about the events in Caracas and Haiti and looking for ways to limit their effect on Puerto Rico's inhabitants, mainly the slave population.<sup>3</sup> By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the specter of the slave revolt in Saint Dominique and the Borbonic reform were processes that went against the grain of a population that at the end of that century, in André Pierre Ledrú's own words, "was an original group."<sup>4</sup> The economic reform that advocated the import of more slaves showed concerns about the slave owners migrating from the French colony. By 1796, Brigadier Don Ramón de Castro, Governor General of Puerto Rico, was suspicious of every group of slaves known to be from Saint Dominique because, he said, "the presence of educated Negroes among the French immigrants and in the middle of that island an insurrection would be dangerous..."<sup>5</sup>

This mental *geography* of revolution against the Spanish Crown and slave revolts was shared, to certain extent, by the Criollos. After explaining in his book how the dancing practices in the Island were composed of Spanish dances and those of "the Island proper," he goes on to explain other dances practiced in Puerto Rico, however, in so doing he shows the Criollo's gaze of the region in which his country is placed:

. . . those [dances] from the Negroes of Africa, and Creoles from Curaçao are not worthy of mentioning under this chapter, although they are seen in Puerto Rico, their practice have not spread throughout the Island. However, I mention them because their quantity adds to the wide variety of dances that a foreigner can see in **just** one Island, even without moving from one town to other.<sup>6</sup>

Africa and Curaçao, are the sources of the dances that Alonso sees as "not worthy of mentioning under this chapter." The *garabato* dances, he pointed out, are the product of "a mix of those of the Spaniards and the Island's primitive inhabitants." Black people are identified with the continent of origin and the Caribbean islands known for the high percentage of people of African descent in their population. Alonso underlined his opinion that these dances were not widely practiced on the Island. In spite of this, it seems to me that he contradicted himself when declaring that "their quantity add to the wide variety of dances." The presence of the dances of the Negroes was *there*. For the Puerto Rican Criollos, free or slave Negroes and Mulattoes were

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<sup>3</sup> See Pedro Tomás de Cordova, *Memorias geográficas, históricas, económicas de la isla de Puerto Rico*. Three volumes published between 1831 and 1833. San Juan: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1968. For instance: Vol. III pp. 148, 172, 475-479; Vol. IV p. 23; Vol. V p. 328.

<sup>4</sup> Ledrú, André Pierre, *Viaje a la isla de Puerto Rico en el año 1797*. Translation by Frances de Julio L. Vizcarrondo (1810). San Juan, editorial Coquí, 1981. p. 43.

<sup>5</sup> Morales Carrión, Arturo, "La revolución Haitiana y el movimiento antiesclavista en Puerto Rico," *Boletín de la Academia Puertorriqueña de la Historia*. Vol. VIII, 1 de Julio de 1983, Num. 30. p. 143-145.

<sup>6</sup> Alonso, Ob. Cit. p. 67. As translated by Noel Allende-Goitía]

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a constant reminder of their lack of exclusivity in the creation of the Island's cultural markers.

Dances, as public displays and performances of identity, were central to the memory of these young Criollos. Festivities were events that not only marked the religious year, but also important for the civic and political institutions. The festivities for Saint John and Saint Peter, the Three Kings Day eve *trullas* [caroling], and private parties all framed the memory of the Island and its people.<sup>7</sup> However, even when describing the dances, there is no account of the composition make up of the group of dancers. The Island population's homogeneity is assumed or its heterogeneity is implicit in the fabric of written and spoken discourse because the only thing qualified as dance were dances that, recognizably, had "their origins from Spain," according to Alonso. It is interesting that Alonso pointed out that the *garabato dances* are the mix of the Spanish national dances and those of the Aboriginal Natives; however, he never made a direct reference to them in his work. Nonetheless, when reminiscing childhood memories of religious and official festivities on the Island, their discourse opened to us a window to a gaze that was more aware of the diverse array of humanity from which their society was built:

[On February 19 of 1830, in celebration of King Fernando VII and María Cristina de Borbón, in San Juan, Puerto Rico] there were people gatherings with bombas and other instruments used by Negroes in their dances, and they held their dances in several points in the city, hailing and praising our King.<sup>8</sup>

However, outside the official and civic festivities the assembly of black people to dance *bomba* was a source of concern to the Spanish officials and the Criollos. As part of the official report on a failed attempt of a slave revolt in the southern part of the island in 1826, we learn that;

Sunday, 9<sup>th</sup> of July [of 1826, the slaves] gathered in the say Salitral, behind Mr. Overman's house, with the excuse of having a bomba gathering or a dance of Negroes . . .<sup>9</sup>

These are the Negroes and mulattoes that Alonso was so anxious to identify as being from Africa or Curaçao. If he could render their persons and their dancing practices as alien to any idea or sense of Puerto Rican-ness, then the Criollo ideology could build the history or memory of the formation of Puerto Rican identity with no or little African presence and/or influences.

The second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the Puerto Rican Criollos divided between those with a strong sense of belonging, as Puerto Rican, to the whole of the Caribbean region, and those that saw themselves as living as a tropical version of the Spanish. Eugenio María de Hostos (1839-1903) represents the more visible of the former. In addition to Ramón Emerterio Betances, a mulatto, and Segundo Ruiz Belvis, he was amongst the outmost advocates of political independence and the creation of what they called The Confederate States of the Antilles.

From my Island [Puerto Rico] I see Santo Domingo, I see Cuba, I see Jamaica, and I think Confederation: I look to the north and I sense Confederation, I tour the

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<sup>7</sup> Alonso, Ob. Cit. Chapters 2, 5, 12, and 16.

<sup>8</sup> Cordova, *Memorias geográficas . . .* Vol. VI, p. 29.

<sup>9</sup> Cordova, ob. Cit. Vol. V, p. 108.

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semicircle of islands that geographically bound and “confederate” Puerto Rico with the whole of Latin America.<sup>10</sup>

He viewed the West Indies as another country among the new nations in the Americas. Hostos saw the Antilles as part of the “natural [economic] plan of the geography of civilization as [regional] intermediaries of the commerce and industry.”<sup>11</sup> The most powerful element in his thoughts was his inclusive view of society, a challenge for the Puerto Rican Criollo. His Comtean view of society had the particular and distinctive quality of counting among the citizenry of the new and would be nations those that the Criollo worldview constructed as marginal to their conception of nationhood. Talking about his work in the Americas he wrote:

I have consecrated, with my voice, my writings, and with selfless interest, to the confraternity of all the disfranchised, whether they were Chinese or quechuas from Peru, or *rotos* and *huasos* or araucanos in Chile, or gauchos or Indians in Argentina . . .<sup>12</sup>

Make no mistake; Hostos’ views belonged to a century-long tradition of positivistic, progressive and liberal ideology on both sides of the Atlantic. However, his views were too liberal, I would argue, and in some cases radical, for the Puerto Rican social, economic, political, and intellectual elite. His views and advocacy works had, using a phrase from José de Diego, an “Astral Geography” [Geografía astral] mapping, in which all the humanity was susceptible to the influences of the positive science. Everyone, through education, could be made into a productive citizen. Eugenio María de Hostos’ ideas and work found a more receptive venue in the new independent Latin American countries where the Criollos’ visions of nationhood found his ideas in tune with theirs.

In Puerto Rico intellectuals like Alejandro Tapia y Rivera, José de Diego, Salvador Brau, and others had another mental map of the region, and Puerto Rico’s place in it. Tapia y Rivera’s views are of interest because in his memoirs he displayed a series of discursive strategies and tactics that make me think about what I see as the modernity of the ancients, and the post-modernity of the moderns. In his memoirs we find a Criollo well aware of the arbitrariness of the place and geographical point of birth and thus the insight of collective identity as a social construct.<sup>13</sup> Tapia’s memoirs give the reader enough reflexive material to use as a critic and deconstruction of the very book that is being read. He gives credit to Jacinto de Salas y Quiroga’s booklet *Un entre acto de mi vida en Puerto Rico* [An Interlude of my life in Puerto Rico] as a big influence. For him Salas y Quiroga’s judgment that “Puerto Rico is the corps of an unborn society”<sup>14</sup> was an accurate description of Puerto Rican society. His main concern was

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<sup>10</sup> Hostos, Eugenio María de, “Speech and rectification, in a session that took place in the Ateneo of Madrid Saturday evening December 20<sup>th</sup> of 1868,” *Eugenio María de Hostos: Works*. Compilation and prologue by Camila Herández Ureña. Habana, Casa de las Américas, 1988. p. 46.

<sup>11</sup> Hostos, “Letter to the president of Peru,” published in *El Argentino*, Buenos Aires, October 13<sup>th</sup> of 1873. Ob. Cit. p. 97.

<sup>12</sup> Hostos, “Letter to the Editor of *El Argentino*,” December 9<sup>th</sup> of 1873. Ob. Cit. p. 103.

<sup>13</sup> Tapia y Rivera, Alejandro. *Mis memorias, o Puerto Rico como lo encontré y como lo dejo*. San Juan: Imprenta Venezuela, 1946. p. 15

<sup>14</sup> Tapia y Rivera. *Mis memorias* . . . p. 28.

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the moral sickness of his countrymen: their attitudes towards the colonial situation.<sup>15</sup> However, his discourse moved within the narrow geographical area of San Juan and Málaga, Andalucía, and the remains of the Spanish Caribbean possessions, Cuba and Puerto Rico. Throughout his work he draws the reader attention to how the island of Saint Thomas functioned as a stage for goods coming from Europe: "St. Thomas was at that time our Liverpool and our Paris in that matter."<sup>16</sup>

Salvador Brau, around 1885 argued that the characteristics of Puerto Rican society were related to race, place and nationhood, psychological make up, values, vices, and intuitions, all of which were typified in the native musical ensemble.

...we will find all condensed in the güiro un-harmonic scrape, in the trepidation of the savage timbal, in that screech sound of the clarinet, up in the high octave, in the smooth, soft, harmonic whispering of the strings, which bring together that wide array of sounds, and over which, in intervals, the resounding brass, which in vain, try to add vigor to the ensemble.<sup>17</sup>

For the generation of the turn of the century, music and musical practices were not seen only as the evidence of the "people's intellectual originality," but also had the ability, through history, to show the "particular character of the races."<sup>18</sup> The danza, Brau argued, is an instance of the latter. Discussing the changes that the danza underwent during the last decades of the nineteenth century, he wrote:

The time went by and the timbal or snare drum, a kind of military drum in its construction, was added, which, no matter how it is performed, on the skin or the rim, make you recall the peculiar quivering of the African bomba, accenting, in an obscene way, the cadence of the dance, adopting the contorted, grotesque, and lascivious dancing style of those people that dance in the streets during our carnival.<sup>19</sup>

The danza as a Creole-European musical form and dance style became the symbol of identity for the Puerto Rican elite. The addition of a particular cultural trade from a non-white sector of the society, "*those people*," was seen as going astray from "the general norms of western culture." This is one of the fundamental premises of this well rationalized racism: the presence of the African descents is not denied, but their active participation in the (re)construction of Puerto Rican identity [*puertorriqueñidad*/Puerto Ricanness] is questioned. Fernando Callejo's writings

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<sup>15</sup> Tapia y Rivera. *Op.cit.* p. 112.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* p. 21.

<sup>17</sup> Brau, Salvador, "La danza puertorriqueña," *Ensayos: disquisiciones sociológicas*. First edition in 1885. Río Piedras, Puerto Rico; Editorial Edil, inc., 1972. p. 88. Published originally in the *Almanaque de Damas para 1885*; and republished in José González Font, et. al., *Escritos sobre Puerto Rico, noticias históricas, poesías, artículos y otros datos*. Barcelona, 1903. p. 34-54.

<sup>18</sup> Callejo, *Op. cit.*, p. 239.

<sup>19</sup> Brau, Salvador, "La danza puertorriqueña," *Op. cit.*, p. 84.

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give us a *classical* instance in which this premise works. Asking himself, if there are "popular songs [and] genuine Puerto Rican dances," he answer that it is "logical to suppose, or deduce, that our regional music, though it has things from our own, is a derivation of the characteristics of the Spanish race, [and] that the genuine Puerto Rican dances are few. They are reduced to those called seis and waltz of the *jibaros* [peasants], and, a social dance, the danza." The presence of the native Puerto Rican and the African descendant is reduced to the presence of percussion instruments: the *bomba* drums and the *maracas* [rattle]. The insistence on (re)presenting, as fundamental racial trademarks, the European-Melody in opposition to the African-Rhythm, as an ontological syllogism, belongs to the Creole [*criollo*] world view in which the native of the Americas and the African descendants are parts of the national *landscape*, but they do not belong to the national defining *characters*. They have nothing to contribute to the dominant culture.

The construction of a collective memory is a non-linear process and, in society as a *heteroglotic-adaptive-system*, the fact that an event will be a shared memory does not mean that its processes of sedimentation will be the same. Fernando Callejo, in the same work in which he declared that "genuine Puerto Rican dances" are just "a derivation of the characteristics of the Spanish race," mentioned how he recalled watching groups of black Puerto Ricans singing in the streets of San Juan during the Puerto Rican Christmas celebration of the Three Kings. Callejo's recollection points to everyday syncretized musical practices seen as *landscape*, not as an actual *feature*, of the collective memory. It is interesting to note that at the same time and at the same place, an Afro-Puerto Rican, Arturo Alonso Schomburg, recalled something different. Schomburg remembered that:

When I was a boy, there was no music more popular than the bomba dance. The drum was the dominant instrument. The people went there in numbers to enjoy the harmless and pleasant delight offered by such splendid exercise.<sup>20</sup>

What for Callejo was a memory, for Schomburg, was an affirmation of his identity as African-Puerto Rican through his active participation in an Afro-Puerto Rican dance.

This view of society was not just an intellectual exercise. These people worked toward the institutionalization of what they termed "the general norms of western culture." First under Spanish rule, early 1898, later that same year, in November, Fernando Callejo and a group of known musicians and civic activists worked to create a government sponsored School of Music. The project included a curriculum, the numbers of professors needed, the enrollment requirement for the students, the creation of some faculty positions with pensions, and an estimated budget for each unit. The break out of the Spanish-American war, in April of 1898, and the economic conditions of the change of sovereignty killed the project at that moment. However, a close look at the project and all the newspaper, journal, and magazine articles that reported the efforts made to bring to realization that century-old dream show that this generation had a cultural project. An institution of musical education in coordination with concert orchestras, music theater orchestras, and school orchestras, were expected to lead an island wide reform

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<sup>20</sup> Schomburg, Arturo Alfonso, "West Indian Composers and Musicians," in Piñero de Rivera, Flor, *Arturo Schomburg: un puertorriqueño descubre el legado histórico del negro-sus escritos y apéndices*. San Juan, Puerto Rico; Centro de Estudios Avanzados de Puerto Rico y el Caribe, 1989. p. 140. Originally published in *Opportunity*. IV, November 1926. p. 353-355, 363.

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movement. The objectives were clear; first, to create the infrastructure needed to develop a wider and better professional musical labor force. Secondly, the creation of orchestras and highly trained musicians would counteract the "preference for a kind of music that only moves our nervous system, our materialistic individuality."<sup>21</sup>

The defeat of the project added to a growing disappointment with the new colonial metropolis. More and more the perception of stagnation in the musical realm became a conviction. The notion that with the United States colonial administration what was won in civilization was lost in culture was coined as part of the island historical discourse.<sup>22</sup> The structure of the government was needed to implement a cultural policy to put forward "the objective of the arts," and help to "fructified the seed of good taste," and also because "our musical art need [...] to be guided towards less narrow and selfish path."<sup>23</sup> The military band ensemble dominated the Puerto Rican social life of the turn of the century. The musicians of those bands were the music teachers and conductors, in most cases the only one, for most of the municipal and school bands. For most of the towns in Puerto Rico the only musical ensemble in the area was a combination of both. Furthermore, those bands were the first, and, in general, the only opportunity for a musical education, meaning the opportunity of learning a profession with a good prospect of social mobility.<sup>24</sup> This state of musical life was unacceptable for Callejo, Chavier, and their colleagues. A musical life and musical genres dominated by the soundscape of the band were not viewed "as prototype of the artistic form, and as the objective of the grand art."<sup>25</sup>

Within that context, the danza was the object of ambivalent criticism. No one questioned its position as the symbol of the cultural and political aspirations of the Creole upper class, professionals and highly skilled, well educated, artisans.<sup>26</sup> However, all those things that were equated with the economic and political failure to establish their hegemonic aspirations in the island were seen cropping out the, claimed to be Creole [criolla], cultural productions and practices. The dominant role of the bands were associated with what they saw as the ill proportioned use of "the most grotesque instruments and percussion" in the performance of dance.<sup>27</sup> Again the Creole [criolla] ideology aspired to a *stay-in-your-place* cultural policy towards the Puerto Rican African descendants. No matter how well educated they were they had

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<sup>21</sup> Chavier, Arístides, "Reflexiones sobre el arte musical," *Puerto Rico musical*. February 13, 1906. p. 10.

<sup>22</sup> Callejo, Fernando, "Casimiro Duchesne," *Puerto Rico musical*. February 15, 1906. p. 8-9. Callejo, *Músicos y música...*, p. 67, 69. Chavier, *Ibid.* Dueño Colón, Braulio, "Estudio sobre la danza puertorriqueña," *Brújula*. (Originally published in 1913, and winner of the Ateneo Puertorriqueño First Prize in 1914.) Vol. III. January-July, 1937, num. 9 and 10. p. 120.

<sup>23</sup> La Hija del Caribe [The Daughter of the Caribbean] (Trina Padilla de Sanz), "Notas musicales," *Puerto Rico musical*. February 15, 1906. p. 5. Chavier, *Op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> Allende-Goitía, Noel, *Por la encendida calle Antillana: cultura musical y discurso histórico en la sociedad puertorriqueña en la década del treinta, 1929-1939*. Unedited Master Thesis, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1992. p. 109-111.

<sup>25</sup> Chavier, *Op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>26</sup> Quintero Rivera, Ángel G., *Patricios y plebeyos: burgueses, hacendados, artesanos y obreros (las relaciones de clase en el Puerto Rico de cambio de siglo)*. Río Piedras, Puerto Rico; Ediciones Huracán, 1988. p. 71.

<sup>27</sup> Chavier, *ibid.*



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to keep out every trade related with their Africanness.

We won't deny that there was a time that our danza degenerated due to the questionable artistic taste of some composers and band conductors when the African bomba was utilized, adding to the danza a grotesque, and anti esthetic, rhythm.

Fortunately, the exquisite taste of artist like Tavárez, Ramos (Heraclio) and Campos was imposed, and the *danza criolla* [Creole danza] recovered the characteristic smooth and graceful rhythm that always had.<sup>28</sup>

Consequently, any level of perceived *africanization* of the danza, or any other cultural practice related to *official* Puerto Rican identity, would jeopardize its canonic status. Therefore, any step toward a (re)establishment of "the characteristic smooth and graceful rhythm" of the *danza criolla*, not only was seen as a way to save it, but, also, the way to complete its evolution. For these people, to save "the typical fabric" of a musical form like the danza, meant that nothing would stand between them and the successful creation of a nation-state.<sup>29</sup>

The notion that Puerto Ricans are the final outcome of a long process of miscegenation became a category of identity. Thirty years of American colonial administration geared in the island toward a process of (re)focusing the racial elements placed in contact, the geographical region where that particular social process takes place, and what kind of identity that results from that process. The racial elements are presented as equally fundamental to the formation of what came to be the Puerto Ricans. However, in the process of match up the racial make up of Puerto Rican society with its collective identity some of the racial elements are seen more equal than others.

We are Indians (native Puerto Ricans), whites, Negroes, and mixed blood. We are a variety, but we are one. We have psychological harmony. We are people. Because we are Indians, we are docile, believers, impressionable, and adventurous. Because we are whites, we are arrogant, stoics, gentlemen, and dramatic. Because we are Negroes, we are distrustful, suspicious of any one, and hard workers. Because we are mixed blood, we are these altogether.<sup>30</sup>

The *all togetherness* of Puerto Rican identity was built upon the assumption that they are " the legitimate product of the European culture and civilization," plus the local spin. Before the failure of the indigenous population to supply the "vital plasma to fight the foreigner," and the little help from the "African element... to surely inhabit the land," the Hispanic element, "our

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<sup>28</sup> Dueño Colón, Op. cit., p. 118.

<sup>29</sup> Callejo, Op. cit., p. 245. "...if our young composers are careful in the production [of the danza], they not only could save its typical fabric, but also complete its evolution, equating our danza with the Hungarian dances and other countries..."

<sup>30</sup> Coll Vidal, Antonio, A collaboration to the section "¿Qué somos? ¿Cómo somos?" Índice. November 13, 1929. p. 35. See also, Colorado, Antonio J., A collaboration to the section "¿Qué somos? ¿Cómo somos?" Índice. November 13, 1929. p. 59.

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European ancestry," represents, historically, the social clotting agent.<sup>31</sup>

The racial *Holy Trinity*, the indigenous, the Spanish, and the African, not only became part of the conceptual scheme, but also a tool of historical periodisation. That history, in which the Spanish race "weakened and absorbed the other two races (the native Puerto Ricans and the Africans), reducing their influence to a minimum," is one that does not deny their presence as part of the nation, or their influence in the culture, or contribution in shaping the Puerto Rican identity, however, it is one in which Puerto Ricans, through Spanish heritage, found the "adequate medium to express their interest for things, and their ideals in life, and faith."<sup>32</sup> Consequently, for them, this historical view of Puerto Rican society explained "the superiority of the Puerto Rican danza, over the danzón, the Cuban danzonete (a derivation of the danzón), and other Afro-Antillian genres of popular music."<sup>33</sup> The presence of a significant numbers of Negroes and mulattoes among the musicians, composers and band conductors that created the Puerto Rican danza was an unavoidable one. Nevertheless, the historic paradigms gear everything toward a whitening of the cultural process, and the racial conflict that the mulatto typifies as an intermediate stage in the process.

That ethnic interposition, the black through the white, is the base of the first Puerto Rican danza-where the white and the black give from each other without prejudice of becoming a hybrid. The danza evolved towards a melancholic, soft, cadence, with a melody of morbid ecstasies over a negligent rhythm. The vital exuberance decayed. It stopped being black and stop being white. The mulatto, a type of romantic, and sentimental Creole (criollo), takes over the danza and in his intention of outdone it, stains it with his hyper trepidation.<sup>34</sup>

What the mix feelings about the danza really show is the ambivalence of this people, towards the persuasiveness of the miscegenation in Puerto Rican society. To explain the incomplete transition from colony to an independent nation-state the mulattoes of the population, of the culture and the psychology of society were seen as factors that, as Pedreira put it, "have retarded the definitive formation of our country." However, the social reality is something that imposed itself to the historical discourse in progress. The men and women of this generation discovered that everyday life challenges and trumps ideological and discursive abstractions, and imagination, everyday, and twice on Sundays.

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<sup>31</sup> Belaval, Emilio S., Los problemas de la cultura puertorriquena. Presented as a conference in 1934. Río Piedras, Puerto Rico; Editorial Cultural, inc., 1977. p. 29.

<sup>32</sup> Cadilla de Martínez, María, *La poesía en Puerto Rico*. Doctoral Dissertation, Universidad de Madrid, 1933. p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> Siaca, Arjona, Op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>34</sup> Rodríguez, Augusto, *Vida y pasión de la danza puertorriqueña*. June 1938 (Typewritten copy). Archivo General de Puerto Rico. CP-31, Section V, p. 3.