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The Contradiction of the Modern Cuban Nation: The Institutionalization of a National Hybrid Identity, *Danza Moderna,* and Spaces of Blackness in Revolutionary Performance Spheres

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

in

Latin American Studies

by

Elizabeth Morgan DiGirolamo

Committee in charge:

Professor John D. Blanco, Chair
Professor Robert R. Alvarez
Professor Milos Kokotovic

2008

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2008

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Contradiction of the Modern Cuban Nation: The Institutionalization of a National Hybrid Identity, *Danza Moderna,* and Spaces of Blackness in Revolutionary Performance Spheres

by

Elizabeth Morgan DiGirolamo

Master of Arts in Latin American Studies

University of California, San Diego, 2008

Professor John D. Blanco, Chair

The international fascination with Cuban popular culture and arts coupled with my curiosity about how the modern Cuban state institutionalized performance arts for the purpose of streamlining national culture inspired my research on Cuba. My work examines the social significance, artistic form, and state management of the cultural arts after the Cuban revolution in 1959 when revolutionary leaders, seeking to redefine the

Cuban nation as a representation of its people, emphasized the expression of national culture through the arts as an educational tool for the masses.

My study of Cuban cultural arts and their role in this national reconstruction project focuses on *danza moderna*, the Cuban modern dance technique, cultural aesthetic, and art form that emanated from revolutionary culture and its political platform. My investigation of *danza moderna* and the political climate that surrounded its inception examines the ways in which Cuba's diverse culture and population was fundamental to its development into a national performance art that explores the hybrid identity of a modern independent nation with a complex history.

My analysis presents a critical view of the state managed artistic production and national aesthetic. This critique brings attention to the severe contradiction between Cuban revolutionary rhetoric and social practice since many social biases based on race and culture linger in Cuban society. Although the Cuban revolutionary aesthetic focuses on the celebration of Afro-Cuban culture and expression as a means to promote that which had long been marginalized, dominant social ideologies and negative racial attitudes remain historically embedded in the nation's social structures and culture.

Introduction:

The 2002 documentary film, *La Tropical*, a work that addresses Cuban popular culture, identity, and economic struggle opens with the image of the body of a black dancer gyrating and spiraling in slow motion. The focus is on her midsection that glistens with sweat as the narrator describes dance in Cuba as "one of the most important non-religious rituals in Cuban society" (Turnley 2002). The combination of the narrator's comments and the image makes a strong statement: In Cuban culture dance and the dancer's body are fundamental to communicating a collective Cuban identity, one that celebrates diversity. The film is testament to the idea that music and dance are among the most important expressions of Cuban culture, making Cuba known throughout the world as a nation that vibrates with sound and movement. This reputation draws countless tourists, scholars, artists, and cultural workers to the island each year to investigate, experience, and understand the rich and complex cultural roots of the Cuban people as they are performed by national music and dance companies and expressed in day-to-day popular culture.

The global fascination with Cuban popular culture and arts combined with my curiosity about how the state developed and institutionalized performance arts for the purpose of streamlining national culture inspired my research on Cuba. My work examines the social significance, artistic form, and state management of the cultural arts after the Cuban revolution in 1959 when revolutionary leaders, seeking to redefine the Cuban nation as a representation of its people, emphasized the expression of national

culture through the arts that were used as an educational tool of the masses. Artists were called on to assist in the ideological transformation of the nation. National institutions were created to foster the collaboration of artists and intellectuals to develop images, discourse, and performances that represented the cultural matrix and diasporic history of the Cuban people and their social traditions. In short, the streamlining of cultural models and educational institutions that contributed to the formation of a collective cultural identity were an integral part of the establishment of a new independent nation state.

My study of Cuban arts and their role in the national reconstruction project concentrates on the development of *danza moderna*, the Cuban modern dance technique, cultural aesthetic, and art form that emanated from the revolutionary culture and its political platform. *Danza moderna* grew out of the international modern dance cultural/political movement that, during the 1960's, was continuing its efforts to transform the purpose and aesthetic quality of dance. Modern dancers and choreographers in the United States, Europe, and, increasingly parts of Latin America were working to create artistic works that represented the human experience and provoked reflection and dialog on the part of artists and spectators alike. Where dance had historically been mainly a form of entertainment, modern dance was creating artistic works that served as a conduit for cultural investigation and awareness. Inspired by this socio-cultural model, Cuba welcomed the collaboration of Cuban and international artists as participants in its newly established national dance school (ENA) and budding *danza moderna* program. By keeping all creative work within the confines of national institutions the state was able to foster the growth of *danza moderna* as a contemporary art form while keeping its development under a watchful eye so that all artistic work

remained within the confines of revolutionary rhetoric. Its place in national performance arts spheres is unique: while other performance arts had a preexisting role in Cuban popular and/or national culture, *danza moderna,* which had developed from the ideology and politics of the revolution, was gaining ground as an important part of the national cultural arts and thus the national political agenda.

Afro-Cuban forms that had been suppressed and marginalized in colonial and neo-colonial histories of the nation were important aspects of the revolutionary cultural model. The inclusion of these cultural practices as respected national culture broadened the spectrum of what was considered acceptable national expression. *Danza moderna*, a part of this expansion, is a unique art form that emphasizes the unification of the diverse cultural backgrounds that constitute Cuban history, society, and culture. Its thematic and technical elements are derived from a combination of colonial cultural influences: Aspects of Spanish culture are merged with African diasporic expression in a form that represents contemporary Cuban society. In this respect, the development of *danza moderna* was an attempt to explore and perform the modern Cuban identity, an identity of an independent people with a diasporic and diverse history. In my investigation of *danza moderna* and the political climate that surrounded it I examine the ways in which the hybrid identity of the nation was a fundamental ingredient of its artistic evolution and development. I also conduct a critical analysis of the national aesthetic that was promoted and produced as part of the state management of artistic expression. This critical view is necessary in order to bring attention to the social contradictions and discrepancies that are apparent in Cuban revolutionary rhetoric and social practice. The Cuban revolutionary aesthetic focuses intently on the celebration and permeation of Afro-

Cuban culture and expression but has done little to deconstruct the social ideologies and negative racial attitudes that are historically embedded in the nation's social structures. It is important to examine the theory and practice of this cultural celebration by analyzing it within the framework of the dominant social ideologies that are prominent in greater Cuban society and history. It is also important, in order to understand the social significance of the reconstitution of the national cultural arts and the inclusion of Afro-Cuban expression and culture in the creation of a Cuban modern dance form, to examine the historical events and attitudes that led up to the revolution.

Historical Context of Cuban Nationalism

During the 19th century, in the years leading to independence from Spanish colonial rule, Cuba's engagement with North American markets, industry, education, and cultural norms accelerated. This increased involvement with North America was an effort by many Cubans, imbued with a new sense of nationalism and eager for sovereignty and independence from Spain, to break away from Spanish cultural norms and economic dependence. Eager for change and looking forward to an independent and autonomous future, these Cubans hoped that by emulating and involving themselves with United States culture and institutions they would be able to eliminate Spanish influence and dependence from their culture and economy and thus make a conscious break with the past. Their sentiments ultimately fueled the rebellions that characterized the Wars for Independence from Spanish colonial rule and the national structures that would take place after the wars.

> The experience in the North influenced decisively how Cubans contemplated a nation of their own. Much in this encounter was incorporated into the narrative of nationality and shaped the way the discourse on nation found expression. In the end, the experience affected the very construct of nation and the character of identity and all but guaranteed the integration of elements of North American moral hierarchies into the formulation of Cuban nationality (Perez 1999, pp. 51-52).

Finally, through the Spanish-American war in 1898, U.S. intervention in Cuba's ongoing struggle for independence aided the final efforts to overthrow the stronghold of Spanish rule. The U.S.-led defeat of Spain was followed by four years of U.S. occupation of Cuba in which "North Americans controlled all facets of Cuban government and heavily influenced foreign policy with regard to trade and investment" (Moore R. 1997, p. 27). The subsequent rise of the Cuban Republic in 1902 was an attempt on the part of Cuban nationals to finally establish Cuba as an autonomous and independent nation. Instead, Cuba remained under U.S. political and economic control. Corrupt politics coupled with sugar and tobacco industries that were dependent on North American markets and industry resulted in a complicated relationship with North America. The independence that Cuba had imagined was compromised by the ways in which it had emulated and aligned itself with North American society, culture, and industry. Ultimately, the combination of U.S. domination and political and economic corruption created a neo-colonial dynamic in the Cuban Republic in which U.S. control of the nation, although unofficial, was as constricting as Spanish colonial rule had been. In the following Perez analyses the complexities of how U.S. neo-colonial rule made its way into Cuban culture and society under the auspices of progress.

> North American influence was less a linear or unilateral imposition than a complex process of negotiation by which many of its most central propositions were embraced by Cubans as affirmations of progress that offered the promise of a better life. They more than adequately prepared the way for the subsequent arrival of North Americans as bearers of more of the same truths after the U.S. intervention in 1898….The development of consciousness of "Cuban" was not a simple political formulation, of course. It had deeper meanings and larger associations with implications that transcended the pursuit of a free Cuba for Cubans. Also involved was a search for new ways to articulate power, which implied the need to devise different possibilities through which to envisage a new future. This endeavor found its dominant expression in an affirmation of modernity, progress, and above all civilization, much of which derived its main characteristics from North American sources (Perez 1999, p.7).

It is made clear in the comments by Perez that the means by which Cuba sought to assert its independence and redefine itself as an independent nation with a distinct American identity was flawed in that the Cuban social model emulated North America in order to rid itself of Spanish influence and colonial rule. The complex relationship with North America that resulted inhibited the island from being able to define social ideologies and practices that would have in turn led Cuba to build a modern autonomous society and economy.

As a result many of the North American regulations, social ideologies, and sentiments that permeated the island inhibited social progress for Cubans (especially Afro-Cubans due to the strong racist attitudes of North America) and solidified the social inequalities that had been characteristic of colonial social structures. After 1898, many Cubans were forced to move from rural areas to urban settings as a result of U.S./Cuban military conflict and/or land seizures in the sale of land to foreign investors (Chomsky, Carr, & Smorkaloff 2003, p.193). These demographic changes also caused a change in the exchange of national culture as Afro-Cuban cultural practices migrated from rural

areas and permeated national culture in urban settings despite the heavily enforced repression of these social groups and their culture. This cultural integration and diversity would later play an important role in Cuba's assertion of a national culture that was not an emulation of external societal norms but came instead from within.

The neo-colonial corruption of the nation's economy and political system inspired increasing objection to U.S. control of Cuba's government and national markets. In the 1920's and 1930's intellectuals led a strong nationalist campaign that criticized the corruption characteristic of the Cuban Republic. Following an international explosion of superficial interest in African and Afro-diasporic culture Cuban intellectuals prompted national discourses on Afro-Cuban culture and diversity that addressed the marginalized peoples and practices within Cuba. Their inquiry prompted the investigation of Afro-Cuban culture in an attempt to broaden Cuban national identity beyond the narrow definitions allowed by U.S. social influence. In the same way that Cubans had tried to break free from the constrictions of Spanish colonialism by emulating North American culture they rejected neo-colonial repression by revising concepts of nationalism that included Afro-Cuban contribution as a legitimate part of Cuban nationalism. These strides forward in Cuban history set the stage for the Cuban revolution of 1959. Intellectual debates gave Cuban revolutionaries and marginalized populations of the island a political platform from which they could set forth to regain control of the nation, speak to the unique contributions of the diverse Cuban peoples, and complete the journey toward political and economic independence once and for all.

In 1959 the Cuban revolution triumphed and Fidel Castro took power, leading the country from a socialist political platform. Immediately, a revolutionary cultural

aesthetic was established and was considered an integral component in the reconstruction of the nation. "Within months of taking power, leaders began passing legislation designed to establish new centers of music, film, theater, and literary production….By 1961, a national arts school (ENA) had been created for the training of musicians, dancers, and visual artists." (Moore R. 2004, p. 7). The link of culture to political change was evident. The national aesthetic produced by artistic production held the cultural expressions of Cuban masses as the source and definition of Cuban nationalism. Benedict Andersen, author of the pivotal work on nation studies entitled *Imagined Communities* states: "nationalism has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which—as well as against which—it came into being." (Anderson 1983, p.12). The concept of the nation in and of itself is a cultural construct. The leaders of the Cuban revolution used this idea and invested a great deal in specific state-monitored cultural models to promote standards by which national expression is defined and allowed.

The centralization of culture as a means to political control is not unique to Cuba nor are the economic and social challenges that scar Cuba's historical plight for independence and national autonomy. Emphasizing the link between culture and political change was a common strategy in the establishment of modern socialist systems that preceded the Cuban revolution. It had been used, for example, in the Mexican, Russian, and Chinese revolutions of and 20th century. The Cultural Revolution in China, in particular, promoted eight theatrical revolutionary model works known as "model theatre." These works and their accompanying cultural propaganda were considered

political education for the Chinese people in the late 1960's. Xiaomei Chen describes this centralization of Chinese culture in her book *Acting the Right Part*.

> Whereas model theater permeated people's lives, posters reinforced, recalled, talked back, and also constructed personal and collective identities during the Cultural Revolution. Where the model theater stopped on the radio, in the movie theaters, and within the four walls of the theater, the images of its revolutionary heroes and heroines printed on posters continued their gaze at their beholders, exhorting them to further revolutionary actions (Chen 2002, p.34).

Modern socialist models such as China emphasize civic organization and state control by showering the public with cultural images that work as political propaganda. Intellectuals and artists operate as active participants in the production of this propaganda and therefore the maintenance of national image and identity. These social figures and dominant social images are revered as necessary and important components of the reconstruction of the nation. Similarly, the revolutionaries in Cuba developed a national cultural model that positioned the image, identity, and culture of the Cuban people as first and foremost in the social reconstruction of the autonomous nation. They promoted popular images and cultural practices as important elements of artistic expression using the Bolshevik and Mexican revolutionary models as inspiration. "Cuban authorities touted sacrifice and valor and mocked the 'bourgeois' culture as a decadent, superannuated relic. Like their Bolshevik models, the leaders of the Cuban cultural bureaucracy saw art as a vehicle for the transmission of political ideology" (Howe 2004, p. 5). What is unique to the Cuban revolution and national reconstruction project is the competitive edge that national cultural investment has given the nation in the face of the economic challenges of recent decades. The state-produced cultural models and popular culture that emphasized a socialist national image currently serve as a major tourist

attraction and therefore indirectly feed the tourist economy that Cuba depends upon for its survival. The Cuban cultural arts and artists have become commodities for sale in international markets.

Throughout my thesis I address the concept of the nation state and national identity, specifically that of the Cuban nation as a cultural construct unto itself. The vehicle I use to understand the contemporary development of Cuba as a socialist nation within a capitalist global market is the state-managed development of the national cultural arts. In chapter one I analyze the period of time during which the 1959 revolution came to fruition as well as the initial development of the national cultural arts that followed. The chapter focuses on the inclusion of Afro-Cuban cultural expression in national performance spheres as revolutionary leaders revised the definitions and structures of national culture.

An important part of Afro-Cuban cultural practices that became accepted as part of national culture are the intellectual debates during the 1920's and 1930's that preceded the revolution. These discourses criticized exclusionary practices characteristic of colonial and neo-colonial periods in Cuban nationalism that characterized a "predominantly 'white nationalist' phase in which Afro-Cubans, though accepted grudgingly as members of society, were excluded from representation in cultural expression" (Moore R.1997, p. 116). During this era Cuban intellectuals, frustrated with the political corruption and U.S.-based control that dominated modern Cuban nationalism, sought to assert national power in a way that distinguished Cuba from other modern cultures and societies. What resulted was *afrocubanismo*, the popularization of marginalized Afro-Cuban cultures, peoples, through their music, dance, and cultural

expression that were a product of colonial structures. "In this phase Afro-Cuban music grew increasingly central to national culture, at least as a somewhat abstract source of inspiration" (Moore R. 1997, p. 116). Afro-Cuban culture had been and continued tobe outlawed and violently repressed. Black Cubans were incarcerated for playing their music and gathering in groups, and musical instruments, specifically drums, were confiscated and destroyed. The intellectual climate during the *afrocubanismo* period was a precursor to the revolution and featured important figures such as Nicolás Guillen, poet and revolutionary who questioned the colonial and neo-colonial identity of the nation and strived to capture and show the socio-political experience of Afro-Cubans in Cuban society and history in his literary creations. Revised social norms and practices of the times inspired by such artists set the stage for the inclusion of Afro-Cuban culture as part of the dominant revolutionary cultural expression.

My analysis of this national transformation leads to an examination of the distinction between art and "folklore". This social distinction is part of the cultural delineation that locates the origin of the diverse aspects of Cuban national culture within the influence of Spanish colonial models and popular cultural models rooted in Afro-Cuban practices. In this discussion I develop an argument that looks at the contradiction inherent in these types of distinctions and therefore in the Cuban cultural model. I bring attention to the ways in which such classifications along with the state-managed celebration and inclusion of Afro-Cuban culture in the official national arts is problematic. Even though Afro-Cuban cultural practice and popular culture became legitimate and important aspects of the revision of modern day Cuban nationalism, contradictions to social equality remained in Cuba.

In chapter two I examine *danza moderna* as a unique and important aspect of the official Cuban cultural arts and therefore a central part of the revolutionary national reconstruction project. I discuss the international inspiration of modern dance that led to the inception of *danza moderna* in Cuba. In this discussion I provide an in-depth explanation of the historical events that led to the creation of *danza moderna* shortly after the triumph of the revolution and investigate its unique quality as a national art form that is inspired by the roots of Cuban culture and the cultural memory of the Cuban people, both European and African. I argue that *danza moderna* was a nationally produced space that blurred the distinction between "high" and "low" classifications of Cuban culture. More specifically, I define the distinction "high culture" as that which is rooted in the Cuban creole elite cultural model established by the colonial and neo-colonial legacies and "low culture" as that of the diverse Cuban masses and popular sectors of society, much of which is rooted in West Africa. *Danza moderna,* I explain, works to blend these cultural influences in one national form and thus create a new category of cultural expression. The development of this dance form involved an artistic/cultural investigation that in turn built an artistic and political platform in which classical and folkloric forms came together in conversation and celebrated the hybrid identity of the nation.

In chapter three I examine in close detail the institutionalized pedagogical structure of danza *moderna* as well as the specifics of the dance technique and physical form. My investigation explores the means by which the Cuban modern dance form is codified and preserved through the instructional programs in the national dance schools. I analyze and explain the aesthetic and energetic quality of signature movements as well

as the professional training of the dancers that concentrates on the development of dancers as cultural and political agents. The dancers are schooled in aspects of Afro-Cuban spirituality and physical gesture as well as a specific technique unique to *danza moderna* that has its roots in several of the experimental modern dance techniques and philosophies of the United States.

Chapter three also examines the training of Cuban modern dancers in the context of the official national arts culture defined by the state. This discussion explores in detail the physical characteristics and Cuban bodies that are emphasized and included within state produced performance models as authentic representations of Cuban nationalism and culture. Dancers are conditioned to participate in national dance companies after leaving the national dance schools. The revolutionary aesthetic is one in which black dancers are afforded specific opportunities as professional dancers; the company that solicits their participation after the completion of their professional training bases its selection of dancers not only on their strength as professional movers (dancers) but also on their physical characteristics. This inquiry leads me to further examine the appropriation of "blackness" and/or the social significance of the black and hybrid body as an instrument of cultural memory and national concepts of authentic culture and identity. The arguments in chapter three (the final chapter of the thesis) analyze the state's approach to the celebration and incorporation of Afro-Cuban participation and culture in the national cultural arts. The analysis demonstrates how the approach of the Cuban state further solidifies dangerous and complex ideologies and discourses surrounding identity and race in Cuba and the Americas.

My research and discussion of *danza moderna* in Cuba is one in which I use the art form and its artistic cultivation as a vehicle for understanding the construction of modern Cuban nationalism. My work has inspired me to ask more questions about where Cuba stands today as an independent nation and cultural legend. The study of the *danza moderna* art form is significant in the current climate of Cuban culture and national identity since it, along with other national cultural art forms, is an important means by which Cuba attracts foreign audiences to the island and keeps its tourist-based economy flourishing. As Cuba struggles economically, the arts and the sensationalized celebration of Afro-Cuban cultures are a means to economic survival. In this respect it is ironic that the national cultural arts that were meticulously developed and supported by the Cuban state now serve as a means for the nation to participate in the capitalist global market. My research of *danza moderna* and the contradictions that exist in modern Cuban nationalism are also important to the current state of Cuban studies and Afro-Latin studies. I am unaware of any previous investigations of *danza moderna*. Its relevance to scholarship on Cuba is clear in that it addresses the unique social, cultural, and ethnic diversity in Cuba and the Americas. Through the investigation of the development of the art form I am able to examine larger social questions that address the ways in which the Cuban revolution still remains to be realized.

Chapter 1:

The Reconstruction and Production of a Revolutionary Cuban Identity as Designed Through the National Cultural Arts

The dancer, the spectator, and public performance of music and dance, whether it is formal or informal, are focal points of national and popular culture in Cuba. The focus on the arts in revolutionary Cuba is one that aspires to build and sustain a system that foregrounds the culture and identity of the people as that of the nation. It is with this perspective that in this thesis I argue that an exploration of official national dance performance and official forms are central to understanding the contemporary constructions of modern Cuban identity and the predominant social ideologies of freedom and national identity as they are defined by the Cuban state. The African diasporic influence in Cuban history is central to state managed civic definitions, therefore Afro-centric national arts are an important aspect of Cuban culture that also serve to attract international audiences eager to experience and understand the uniquely Cuban essence and quality of being. Crucially this essence is part of and has been produced by the Cuban revolution. This thesis explores the very process by which these Afro centric models have been placed at the center of national culture and therefore modern national identity within the official national performance arts, modern dance specifically.

In this chapter I explore how the Cuban revolution of 1959 expanded upon and redirected the ideological shifts of the 1930's through the production of the diverse Cuban cultural performance arts. The definition of culture in the national revolutionary project was central to redefining and "re-imagining" notions of Cuban national identity. The reconfiguration of national performance arts played a large role in the negotiations of

national identity and civic participation. The meaning of national identity continued to be re-inscribed through state rhetoric and cultural production that attempted to erase class and racial divides in the name of national solidarity. The revolutionary government made a conscious effort to emphasize cultural practices that had existed in the periphery of society and move them to the center of national discourse and production. As a result, the use and management of Afro-Cuban cultural memory legitimized the culture of the masses creating a symbolic national image that conveys the essence of national solidarity. An important part of this investigation examines the way national efforts to move Afro-Cuban cultural practices from the margin to the center were not without their shortcomings. The form and function of these cultural practices were altered as they became theatrical and performed in the national limelight.

The period in Cuba following the triumph of the revolution, post 1959, produced a conscious shift in Cuban culture, identity, and popular expression. Cuban revolutionaries worked to establish a Cuban socialist nation that replaced imperialist ideologies and capitalistic influences of the North. A great part of this was the celebration of the diverse identity and history of all the Cuban people in the context of social justice and equality. Cuban cultural arts gained political attention as a means by which the rich cultural and diverse racial backgrounds of the Cuban people could be celebrated and explored. [i] As a result, official national cultural arts expanded in both quantity and scope. Dance, music, and cultural practices of the people became an important vehicle by which revolutionaries sought to communicate and disseminate socialist ideologies in which all citizens and traditions, regardless of race or heritage, were of equal importance within national discourse and frameworks. The arts (dance and

music specifically) and spaces of cultural production became integral to the way in which a new Cuba would be communicated. They were important means by which social constructions, identity, and cultural diversity could be explored, communicated, and utilized by the state. Thus, they became central to the dominant social constructions and integral to the way in which concepts of Cuban national identity are formed, validated, and celebrated.

The revolution set out to fulfill the empty promises of the Cuban republic that had formed after independence was won from Spanish colonial rule in 1899. The triumph of the Cuban revolution encompassed a complete overhaul of the political and civic structures of the nation, a process that built upon the stirrings of political and social restructuring that had begun in the mid 1930's. Redefining notions of Cuban national identity that incorporated the myriad of cultural histories and traditions of the Cuban people were at the forefront of national agendas. The social restructuring that resulted after Spanish rule did not acknowledge and legitimize all social groups and racial categories of society equally, reaffirming and solidifying many of the divisive and unjust racial ideologies that had existed during the colonial era. Demands for social justice, racial equality, and the valorization of the Afro-Cuban contribution to society grew while the pre-revolutionary repression of these movements remained fierce.

It was not until Cuba entered what we know as the "critical decade" (Moore R. 1997, p.1) of the 1920's and 1930's, in which Cuban intellectuals began to emphasize the *mestizo* characteristics which enrich Cuban culture and create the richly diverse society that Jose Martí spoke of in his famous work *Nuestra America*. Among liberal intellectuals Cuba was defined as a culture and society of "creole or mulatto imagery"

(Moore R. 1997, p.1). Discourse about the mixing of African, Hispanic, and indigenous populations, heritages, and cultures that had molded Cuban culture and history took a central position in the intellectual debates. Robin Moore explains this time period and ideological shift in Cuban culture in his work *Nationalizing Blackness* (1997) as a time in which the promotion of Afro-Hispanic cultural fusions was prevalent in contrast to the previous period when Afro-influenced culture had been shunned and excluded from national identification. Moore comments on this shift in the introduction of his work, "The mulatto nation metaphor refers to a physical process -the racial mixing of Caucasians, Africans, and indigenous peoples over the centuries -but, more important, a cultural one involving the fusion of once distinct systems of language, religion, artistic forms, and other expression into a unique composite" (Moore R. 1997, p.1). Contending notions and interpretations of *la Cultura Cubana* became a focal point in defining what it meant to be Cuban and what was unique about the nation and its cultural contribution to the modern world. Race and cultural practice occupied the forefront of these debates as intellectuals "sought to reconcile the perceived social reality of racial plurality with the need to forge a culturally homogenous, politically stable, and economically prosperous modern nation" (De La Fuente 2001, p. 176). In the 1930's the new Cuban intellectual ideology set the stage for the national reconstruction project of the revolution. The debates that spawned in the 1920's and 1930's during the republican period in Cuba contextualized cultural and historical influences that were important to Cuban culture. These debates created the foundation for the revolution and the struggle to create a new modern Cuba in the image of all Cuban people.

The cultural investigation of the 1930's inspired an inquiry where issues of race, cultural diversity, and political agency were confronted. It had become clear that the diverse nature of the Cuban nation needed to be explored, celebrated, and acknowledged on a national scale. Unfortunately the debates that followed circulated only within a specific sector of Cuban intellectual society. They remained heavily entrenched in the racist ideologies of the Spanish colonial past as well as within the strong influence from U.S. imperialist powers.

Increased attention to African contributions as central to Cuban music and dance initiated a socio-cultural trend that we have come to know as *afrocubanismo*, (Moore, R. 1997). *Afrocubanismo* is a cultural framework of the 1920's and 1930's that acknowledges and centralizes the influence of black expression in Cuban arts and popular history. The recognition and incorporation of the African aspects into Cuban popular culture during the critical decade (1923-1933) grew in popularity but still collided with oppressive ideologies of the past. Music and dance represented "forms of expression accessible to minorities that appeal to listeners across class and racial boundaries" and were therefore a space in popular culture where the incorporation of certain aspects of black expression and culture had become socially acceptable even though the origin of such expression was still forbidden and marginalized. Moore explains this pattern in greater depth:

> the period around 1930 represents a tentative valorization of influences long suppressed….Music and dance have served as a means of real and symbolic empowerment for those who would otherwise have no voice. They have also provoked violence and repression by those opposing such empowerment….African derived culture in an abstract sense may have been essential to dominant conceptions of *cubanidad* beginning in the 1930's, but in many of its traditional forms it continued to be condemned

> as backward, lewd, or primitive, as it is sometimes even today (Moore 1997, p.4).

The tentative recognition of Afro-Cuban contributions to post-colonial national culture had much to do with the lingering social values and structures that formed racist ideologies based in colonial discourse. This trend in which the ideologies of colonial societies remain in post-colonial societies is common in many post-independence republics in Latin America and beyond, it is not unique to Cuba. In Latin American nations slavery was abolished at different moments but in many of these nations the social ideologies and class structures that upheld racist practices and social stratifications within slave societies remained in place, thus transferring colonial practice to post-colonial society. Initially, in colonial times, the traditions and ritual practices of the African slaves were unfamiliar and feared due to the fact that ritual allowed the slaves to communicate with one another in a way that the white slave masters did not understand. Later, beginning in the earlier part of the republican period (1902-1958) African ritual practice and culture was looked down upon as a part of vernacular culture that was considered unrefined and vulgar, "black culture" was seen as a menace to the progress of Cuban society. Afro-Cuban culture, specifically elements of music and dance, were labeled "primitive" and "distasteful" and therefore the source of the demise of Cuban culture. Moore, in *Music and Revolution*, states that elite Cubans went out of their way to purge the Cuban culture of the Afro-Cuban contribution:

> elite society remained decidedly anti-African, as manifested in attitudes toward culture. Newspapers such as *La Prensa* stated in the 1910s that the nation was doomed to failure as long as it tolerated, among other things, rumba and African-derived dances….African labor had provided the economic foundation for the republic, but the twentieth century Cubans

> went to considerable lengths to purge African elements from national expression (Moore, R. 2006, p. 172).

Afrocubanismo emerged from the liberal intellectual climate that had begun to embrace Afro-Cuban culture and history, yet it fell short as these new liberal ideologies and practices failed to reach mainstream society. Racist practices remained in greater Cuban society reaffirming social divisions and inequalities that were founded in colonial society.

Jorge Duany comments on the historical lineages of racist ideologies in contemporary social structures in an essay in the Journal of Latin American Caribbean Ethnic Studies. The essay is entitled "*Racializing Ethnicity in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean: A Comparison of Haitians in the Dominican Republic and Dominicans in Puerto Rico".* His argument is useful here because it 1) examines the importance of historical patterns in contemporary society and 2) explores how racial distinctions reaffirm social stratification as contemporary discourse remains entrenched in colonial ideologies.

> Any serious reflection on the contemporary Caribbean must therefore grapple with the construction of national identities based on disparate 'races', multiple ethnicities, and transnational connections. As part of their nationalist projects, Hispanic Caribbean Creole elites have articulated the myth of a 'racial democracy' based on the ideology of *mestizaje*, common to Latin American societies from Mexico to Brazil. However, recent research has documented the constant subordination of Native Americans, blacks, mulattoes, mestizoes, and other non-European peoples from dominant discourses of national identity in the Americas (see Dzidzienyo & Oboler 2005). A crucial question then becomes how different ethnic groups become associated with particular 'racial' distinctions and how such distinctions are embedded in local systems of stratification, such as those emerging from the plantation system that prevailed throughout the Caribbean until recently (Duany, 2006).

This statement makes clear that racial distinctions are fluid categories that can be molded to reaffirm a national status quo that has roots in the colonial period. Hence, social stratification and racial identifications of early 19th century Cuba coupled with the emergence of black culture in popular public performance in the early 20th century set the stage for an ideological shift in national discourse and racial politics in the Cuban Revolution of 1959. A defining quality of the revolutionary nation was to obliterate the social structures and distinctions based on race and ethnicity that existed in Cuban society from the colonial plantation society. The national reconstruction project, directed by the revolution, aimed to contest and obliterate social stratification and racial identifications of the past and create a unified and strong modern Cuban nation where social distinction based on race did not exist.

Since the triumph of the revolution, national performance arts in Cuba have become integral in national culture and have been managed and sculpted to focus upon the influence of West African diasporic cultures in the Cuban population, history, and culture. During the revolutionary period an emphasis was placed on the integration of marginalized Afro-Cuban cultural practices and participants in an effort to "reposition traditional Afro-Cuban artistic expression" (Moore, 1995 p.166) in Cuban culture as a whole and within the framework of a modernized nation. Revolutionaries sought to redefine Cuban culture, social structures, and notions of national identity, building upon the social and intellectual debates that had begun in the 1930's. Similarly, they worked to rid Cuban culture, society, and identity of neo-colonial ideologies and imperialist frameworks of the United States that upheld racist and divisive social structures and policies. Fidel Castro asserted that the very act of identifying as "Cuban" signified an

association with a multiplicity of identities, cultures, and histories that compose Cuban society. These traditions have blended and fused together as if they were the ingredients of Fernando Ortiz's stew or "*ajiaico*" discussed in his popular essay "*Los Factores Humanos de la Cubanidad"* which explores Cuban culture and identity. The revolution aimed to create a nation in which racial identification was insignificant and counter-productive to national unity. All citizens were to be understood as being part of a greater whole. Revolutionaries saw the revolution and the construction of a progressive modern nation supported by a loyal public as the first and foremost preoccupation of the state and therefore the Cuban people. For any citizen to develop or entertain notions of personal and national identity that were not state-centered was considered counter-revolutionary. In short, the intent of the revolutionaries in their quest to develop a new Cuba was to have all participants of the nation focus primarily upon the Cuban revolution and its ideologies. Anything outside the revolution would be seen in competition or as a distraction to the workings of national solidarity. Castro himself reiterates this proposition in the following excerpt from his speech given in 1961.

> *Nosotros creemos que la Revolución tiene todavía muchas batallas que librar, y nosotros creemos que nuestro primer pensamiento y nuestra primera preocupación deben ser: ¿qué hacemos para que la Revolución salga victoriosa? Porque lo primero es eso: lo primero es la Revolución misma y después, entonces, preocuparnos por las demás cuestiones. Esto no quiere decir que las demás cuestiones no deban preocuparnos, pero que en el ánimo nuestro, tal como es al menos el nuestro, nuestra preocupación fundamental ha de ser la Revolución.*
>
> We believe that the Revolution still has many battles to win, and we believe that our main thought and concern should be: What can we do so that the Revolution can be victorious? Because the principle is this: the revolution itself is first and later, then, we can worry about any other questions. This is not to say that that we should not worry about other

> questions but that in our courage, that which is at least ours, our fundamental preoccupation must be the Revolution (Castro 1961, p. 5).

Subsequently, as a part of fostering national solidarity, the state prohibited individual identification or social classification along racial lines. This included the construction of social alliances that promoted the search for the significance of social roots exclusive to any one racial identity, specifically Afro-Cuban identity even though Cuban officials allied themselves with revolutionary Black Power groups of the United States such as the Black Panthers (Moore, C. 1988).

The double standard of the Cuban state became clear as Cuban artists who independently addressed issues of the Afro-Cuban identity and the black aesthetic from outside of the cultural work of the national institutions were silenced. All cultural investigation had to be conducted within national institutions, frameworks, and discourses. Therefore, social groups and/or study groups of artists and intellectuals that examined the roots and lineage of African history and culture in Cuba, even though the members of the groups considered their actions to be within the rhetoric of the revolution (Howe 2004, p. 80), were prohibited. The contradiction was made clear: while Cuba welcomed exiled revolutionary black nationalists to the island from the United States it was quick to crush any social inquiry of Afro-Cuban solidarity in Cuba.

> The dilemma inadvertently exposed the Cuban government's double standard toward Afro-Cubans when they manifested black pride and gathered to discuss racism and black solidarity. Incongruously, Cuban authorities harassed Afro-Cubans on the basis of their alleged ideological association with African American radicals and their agenda. The paradox was especially striking for the playwright and theater director Tomás González, who says that his unofficial title as leader of the Cuban Black Power movement persuaded officials that he was a principal player and a racist promoting separatist politics in Havana….They (González and fellow artists) had envisioned themselves at the cutting edge of the

> revolutionary movement, poised at the brink of an epoch of radical social change (Howe 2004, p. 80).

Activity and social inquiry that meant to address issues of racism and the black experience in Cuban history was lumped together with other national threats and considered to be divisive and in competition with the unifying efforts of the revolution. The state rhetoric and social practice was part of the attempt to establish national identity as all important and above all other cultural and racial identifications. After 1959 the state asserted that identification based upon ethnic or racial identity ie. black, white, or mestizo characteristics, ceased to exist (Howe 2004). The only identity of importance was a Cuban national identity. Lisa Howe comments on the state's need to be in control of a definition and a collective social culture: "The synthesis of limits on cultural expression, combining bourgeois, gay, and black elements under the negative rubric "social aberration," reflects the official paranoia as well as a strategy to crush any challenge to the homogeneous Cuban identity and the folkloric concept of Afro-Cuban society" (Howe 2004, p. 82).

Integration and equalization of all races was at the forefront of national ideological agendas in the effort to create a class-less and race-less society in which all citizens were to have equal access to resources and social opportunity regardless of race or previous economic standing. This theme was followed by "the desegregation of all neighborhoods, parks, hotels, cabarets, and beaches" (Moore, R. 2005, p. 173). An effort was made to ensure even and fair distribution of employment and educational opportunities to the black and mixed race portions of the Cuban population and therefore greater equality on the state level was granted to Afro-Cuban populations as a result of

equalizing the socioeconomic foundation within society. However, any movement toward an understanding of the black experience in Cuban history and culture beyond what the state defined as folklore was denied and determined as outside the parameters of national unity. As the state attempted to realign, de-stratify, and solidify society it failed to deconstruct the social ideologies that were entrenched in the colonial framework and, as Duany asserted, the "'racial' distinctions and how such distinctions are embedded in local systems of stratification". I argue that the lack of such an inquiry prohibited the national cultural arts from questioning and therefore truly representing the social identity of the people. Instead, these arts were prescribed by the state, and were therefore not a product of the people themselves.

The social, political, and cultural discourses that resulted from negotiations of the confines of the revolution and that surrounded Cuban national identity were dominated by re-negotiations of ethnic and cultural practice with regard to citizenship. Issues of race were considered to be embodied within economic class issues and questions of access rather than inherent within social stratification based on the color of one's skin. Thus, efforts by Cuban citizens to explore issues concerning racism, racial prejudice, or define social groups based on racial solidarity were determined as a "threat to national unity". National solidarity was an important component of revolutionary struggle in order to remain strong against imperialist factions. The Cuban state proposed that no longer was society organized or "imagined" in terms of race, social standing, or class structures as it had been. All citizens were to identify equally as "Cuban" disregarding previous stratifications that were characteristic of colonial and post-colonial social frameworks.

The control over civic identity and the attempt by the state to reorganize and unify the Cuban society around a national culture is addressed in the following citation by Fernando Martínez Heredia, a Cuban writer: "in the national, the conflicts, the subordinations, the accommodations, negotiations, pressures, and struggles of social groups are revealed or hidden. In the post-colonial world, national culture is considered strategic, is mobilized, becomes a political issue" (Beverly 2002, p. 140). In this vein, the state elected to develop and expand national cultural arts to determine, define, and embody the political and national structures of the nation in specific ways. The subsequent incorporation of black Cubans and Afro-Cuban culture in official culture was a part of the effort and revolutionary process to re-write Cuban history and redefine *la cultura Cubana* in light of all of its people and its cultural memory.

The political rhetoric of the revolutionary leaders Fidel Castro, Che Guevara and others spoke strongly against racist practices of the past as well as against any movement based upon racial solidarity. This rhetoric was an attempt to erase discordant practices within society but it was unable to erase the fact that racist social ideologies were deep-seated in Cuban history and culture and would continue as an undercurrent within the society despite political and economic attempts to erase them. These attempts to define the nation in terms of the creation of a harmonious union of all races and cultural heritages denies years of oppression that defined racial formations and social ideologies of the past. Juan Rene Bentacourt, "*Fidel Castro y la integracion Nacional*" (1959) explains the short-sightedness and shallow nature of the state's rhetoric, upon which the modern Cuban nation had been formed: "It is impossible that anyone should believe, seriously and in good faith, that by ceasing to refer to "blacks" and "whites" the people

will forget their existence, and racial discrimination will thus be liquidated by this miraculous method" (Moore C. 1988, p. 21). The approach of Castro and the state "entirely ignored the ethno-political and psycho-cultural ramifications of the Cuban system of white supremacy" (Moore, C. 1988, p. 21). Artists, writers, intellectuals, and professionals were made to confine their work to the exploration of Afro-Cuban culture and identity as it pertained to the parameters of the national, not as it pertained to the oppressed cultural memory of a marginalized population. This is made evident by the words of Fidel in his speech to Cuban artists and intellectuals in the summer of 1961:

> Esto significa que dentro de la Revolución, todo; contra la Revolución nada. Contra la Revolución nada, porque la Revolución tiene también sus derechos y el primer derecho de la Revolución es el derecho a existir y frente al derecho de la Revolución de ser y de existir, nadie. Por cuanto la Revolución comprende los intereses del pueblo, por cuanto la Revolución significa los intereses de la Nación entera, nadie puede alegar con razón un derecho contra ella.
>
> This indicates that everything is to exist within the revolution; beyond the revolution is nothing. Against the revolution nothing, because the revolution also has its rights and the first right if the revolution is to exist and in front of the right of the revolution, is nobody. For how much the revolution understands the interests of the people, for how much the revolution indicates the interests of the entire nation, nobody can allege with reason a right against it (Castro 1961, p. 10).

We see here that there was little tolerance for anything or anyone that asserted any practice or belief higher than that of the revolution and the devotion to the nation state. As a result, they were denied the ability to explore and re-create or re-write history and the cultural memory of marginalized peoples outside of the hegemonic revolutionary structures. Lisa Howe explores the way in which the Cuban state mandated the labeling and use of Afro-Cuban cultural practice and identity as the "folklore" of Cuban society

therefore restricting the exploration of Afro-Cuban cultural contributions to Cuban society.

> Efforts to define black culture constitute a search for more decentralized notions of culture and have never been carried out in an impartial context, but in one of denomination. As Tomás Fernández Robiana asserts, couching the black legacy in scant folkloric terms denies various, and possibly more critical, versions of history (Howe 2004, p. 83).

It was the state's posture toward national unity and social equality that drove the expansion of the national cultural arts in aim and scope to incorporate all elements of Cuban culture and expression. A concerted effort was made to incorporate the people and culture that had existed on the periphery of national discourse but in a way that was mandated by the state. By and large, these included black peoples and cultures and the ceremonial practices of Afro-Cuban spirituality. The restructuring of national performance intended to create a "historical consciousness" to "give Africa and its descendents the place they deserved in the formation of the Cuban nation" (De La Fuente 2001, p. 287). The objective was a unified and proud Cuban people/*pueblo* that "produced" the new face of the nation. The aim was to retell the history of the Cuban nation through the cultural expression of all of Cuba's people.

The state identified performance arts and literature as critical and crucial elements in the education of Cuban citizens with regard to the restructuring of national identity and social structures. Cuba's socialist state valued the development of state institutions that worked to establish a new national consciousness that would control citizens ideologically rather than with force. Velez states: "the revolutionary government considered all manifestations of culture important tools to achieve the ideological goals

of the revolution" (Vélez 2000, p 71). Cuban officials and intellectuals proposed that through dance, music, and written works the Cuban people would be brought together to share, celebrate, and value their rich and diverse cultural heritage. Thus, the state posited the culture of the popular sectors where dance and music are integral parts of social interaction, community lineage, and spiritual practice and as the face of the national. This national face/cultural posture emphasized a continued inquiry into the Afro-Cuban contribution to civil society to promote an exploration of the nation's "folklore". Literally, this investigation was a means by which the cultural practices of the marginalized Afro-Cuban sectors of society, a culture that historically had been feared and looked down upon as a strange, vernacular culture, could be examined and reproduced in national theatre, dance, and music performances as a representation of national lore and therefore Cuban folkloric culture.

As a result, the representation of Afro-Cuban culture and the popular cultures of the Cuban masses exploded in national performance. The study and state valorization of national cultural roots and the subsequent investigation and creation of culture that was termed "national folklore" was at the forefront of national agendas. "The revolutionary government has always recognized Afro-Cuban arts to be a repository of Cuba's unique character, a powerful populist symbol of the nation" (Moore R. 2005, p. 174). The Cuban state wanted to capture the uniquely Cuban quality and incorporate this quality in national performance in order to recreate the Cuban national image from the roots of its history and culture. Thus, the Cuban arts, a tool in the reconstruction of Cuban society, served as the symbol of socialist ideologies that were the foundation of the Cuban revolution. The following quote is from a book by Maria del Carmen Hernandez that was

published by the Cuban Ministry of Culture, a department of the Cuban government that was created in 1961 to manage all Cuban cultural arts and events. It demonstrates the national rhetoric that managed the development of the arts and the integration of Afro-Cuban cultural practice in national performance as a representation of national Afro-Cuban folklore.

> *La sociedad socialista exige un arte y una literatura que a la vez proporcionen en el disfruto estético, contribuyen a elevar el nivel cultural del pueblo…promoverán los mas altos valores humanos, enriquecerán la vida de nuestro pueblo y participarán activamente en la formulación de la personalidad comunista*.
>
> The socialist society requires an art and literature that provide an enjoyable aesthetic while, at the same time, contribute to the advancement of the culture of the people…. They (art and literature) will promote the highest human values, they will enrich the life of our society, and they will actively participate in the formation of the communist personality (del Carmen Hernandez 1980, p.108).

This citation demonstrates the political agenda behind the development of the ideological state apparatus and the subsequent investment in cultural arts as an important part of the revolutionary project. National performance arts had become a site in which the exploration of new concepts of a cultural memory and heritage could be explored and thus become influential in the molding of cultural identity and the expression of national agendas. Harry J. Elam Jr. addresses this phenomenon: "performance can constitute, contain, and create "cultural memory." By cultural memory, we mean those collective memories that are culturally constructed over time and whose meanings are historically and culturally determined" (Elam 1999, p. 9). The attempt by the Cuban state to transfer Afro-Cuban cultural practices from the margins of society to the theatrical stage as a representation of national folklore was an attempt to embrace and/or capture the

multiethnic and cultural nature of the nation within the confines of state controlled discourse.

My examination of the Afro-Cuban focus in the state agendas and subsequent transformation of national performance warrants an analysis of the role and purpose of performance itself in the construction and communication of cultural memory as it contributes to the re-interpretation of history. By cultural memory I mean the practice of tradition as it has been passed down through the generations of a populace. In nations like the Americas, Cuba specifically, the cultural memory of the people is often of a transnational character as diasporic populations continued to practice the cultural traditions that were important to memory and identity of their people. Joseph Roach an author and professor of performance and theater studies comments:

> Performance, in other words, stands in for an elusive entity that it is not but that it must vainly aspire both to embody and to replace. Hence flourish the abiding yet vexed affinities between performance and memory, out of which blossom the most florid nostalgias for authenticity and origin. "Where memory is," notes theorist-director Herbert Blau, "Theater is".
> ….The key, in other words, is to understand how circum-Atlantic societies, confronted with revolutionary circumstances for which few precedents existed, have invented themselves by performing their pasts in the presence of others. They could not perform themselves, however, unless they also performed what and who they thought they were not (Roach 1996, p.4-5).

Here, performance is derived from the construction of re-interpretations of memory, a re-writing of the way in which history is remembered that serves as a form of "counter memory" to the interpretations of history that prevailed previously. The embodiment of Afro-Cuban ceremonial practice and culture on the proscenium stage in the official cultural arts further removes Afro-Cuban practitioners from the sacred practices

themselves and the historical context in which these practices have been preserved. Similarly, the production of a culture within a specific space at a specific time for the specific purpose of the producing an image of the "national" defines these cultural memories against the purpose they have served throughout their existence. Howe comments on this process: "Afro-Cubans had to contend with the revolution's hegemonic utopian representations: a homogeneous nationalism politicizing aesthetic, fusing the political, ideological, and cultural in an attempt to do away with imperialism, religious tradition, and entrenched racism" (Howe 2004, p.72). The production of Afro-Cuban culture and tradition as a part of the national agenda served to re-invent Cuban national identity and re-position the role of Afro-Cuban cultural roots in the construction of modern day Cuba.

It is important to examine the ways in which the restructuring of national culture and the national participation that centered on Afro-Cuban identity differed from the focus of several decades earlier. The inclusion of and integration of Afro-Cuban cultural contributions to the Cuban national identity as they existed in their "authentic" form was different from the explorations of culture during the late 1920's and 1930's that gave rise to the vogue of *afrocubanismo* in which Afro-Cuban culture was used to inform culture already defined by middle class frameworks. The difference in the two ways in which Afro-Cuban culture was used to redefine Cuban national culture represents a shift in the national focus between the two time periods. Black performers in the 1930's during the *afrocubanista* cultural movement had been regarded as entertainers rather than as esteemed artists who were responsible for the making of national culture as they were during the revolutionary period. As a result of the latter, revolutionary advances to

restructure national identity through the celebration of culture resulted in an explosion of Afro-Cuban culture in national performance spaces and the professionalization of Afro-Cuban practitioners. Before this period Afro-Cuban contributions were defined as entertainment and the tradition from which such expression came from remained marginalized.

> An appreciation for the inconsistencies between 1920's *afrocubanismo* as an ideology embracing black expression discursively and the extent to which traditional Afro-Cuban arts were actually accepted is vital in evaluating the significance of the period. Even more important, the mass acceptance of certain forms of black music and dance by Cuban society did not necessarily imply greater social equality for or empowerment of Afro-Cubans themselves (Moore R. 1997, p. 4).

African elements of Cuban culture such as the playing of ceremonial rhythms on consecrated drums and dances that speak of the history and tradition of popular culture and/or the representation of religious figures, and religious ceremonies that involve both of these activities had remained oppressed in the periphery of national culture throughout most of Cuban history. During the revolution they were brought to the forefront of national discourse and emphasized as an important part of the Cuban cultural heritage and national expression. The difference in the way in which Afro-Cuban culture is revered politically distinguishes the two time periods: before and after. However, we have to recognize that *afrocubanismo* and the discourses set forth by the liberal intellectuals of the Republican period in Cuban history were important precedents for later developments in Cuban national culture where Afro-Cuban cultural practices such as ceremonial music and dance of Afro-Cuban spiritual practices gained the national spotlight. It was the work of this time period and those that began conversations

surrounding the role of black Cuban culture in society that paved the way for the political and social advancements and discourses that occurred within the revolution.

The active re-formation and de-centering of national culture and performance by the revolutionary Cuban state was enacted with the intention of reshaping the national consciousness around a united all-inclusive civic body. Cuban citizens who had been blocked from participating professionally due to their race and/or cultural affiliations were legitimized within new state rhetoric as prominent and important participants in the creation of culture. The arts that were defined as "national" expanded in scope and the production of national dance companies took shape in multiple genres of staged cultural performance. The *Teatro Nacional*/National Theater featured music performances of ceremonial and popular Afro-Cuban rhythms and national dance companies expanded in number and scope to include not only Cuban ballet but also performances that featured the ritual and popular dances of Afro-Cuban culture such as the dances of the *Orishas*, deities that are central to the Afro-Cuban religious practice known as *Santería* or the *Regla de Ocha*. Cubans of darker skin tones were important participants within these spaces. It was at this time that the birth of a Cuban modern dance technique and national modern dance company *Conjunto Nacional de Danza Contemporanea* that is now known today as *La Danza Contemporanea Nacional de Cuba* took shape. This new dance form strived to develop a fresh and vital artistic form that demonstrates the complexity of Cuban culture and history thematically and stylistically (see chapter two). Its inception in the early sixties with the reformation of the national cultural arts came at a time when

modern dancers and choreographers in the United States were pushing the boundaries of dance and questioning its purpose and utility in society.

Occurring simultaneously with the creation of the national modern dance company was the inauguration of several national folkloric dance groups throughout the island. These groups brought to the proscenium stage the performance of the ceremonial dance and music of Cuba's many diasporic populations. The *Conjunto Folklorico Nacional* (CFN) of Havana was founded within this movement in 1962. The national dance company strove to promote Afro-Cuban folklore as art and to perform selected cultural forms that were determined by founding members to be "authentic" and to have "artistic value". The creation of this particular company marked the beginning of the secularization of Afro-Cuban culture and ritual, or as it was termed, Afro-Cuban folklore.

"Folklore" has become important with regard to how Afro-Cuban traditions were celebrated or legitimized within new national constructs and Cuban concepts of modernity. Although the measures taken by the revolutionaries to validate Afro-Cuban culture were deemed a priority in national discourse, they were not without severe contradictions. The repression of Afro-Cuban religious practice remained strong while aspects of ceremonial practice were taking form in national performance. A specific contradiction is present here in that the state attempted to secularize Afro-Cuban tradition and cultural practices by validating their culture without actually validating the Afro-Cuban ritual practices themselves. A key part of this process is to reconstitute the form of the ceremonial practices as something apart from society, as a "folkloric" form that existed outside of everyday life so that it coexists with defined notions of freedom and

national identity. As Moore states: "It (the revolution) has sought to extirpate Afro-Cuban religions, by fighting them directly or by seeking to transform them into artistic folklore." (Moore C. 1988, p. xi). Although central to the new Cuban revolutionary ideology, Afro-Cuban culture had not been completely validated within society. As is made clear here by Moore, Afro-Cuban culture was re-positioned as "folklore" so that the state controlled where ceremonial practice was legitimate.

The effort to include ceremonial practice into the national arts was two-fold. It was an attempt to bring such practices into mainstream culture and dispel the fear and rumors that existed around them. White Cubans, historically, had seen African based rituals as dangerous and unruly, a sentiment that dates back to the fear of slave uprisings after the success of the 13-year Haitian revolution in 1804. The cultural practices of slaves were not understood and therefore they were not trusted. It was through the performance arts that Cuban nationals sought to "normalize" these aspects of Cuban culture and control the practice of Afro-Cuban rituals so that they would be performed solely as a part of state managed national culture. Ceremonial dances and music integral to the cultural and religious practices of Afro-Cuban spirituality and culture were performed on national stages. Hence, many practitioners of Afro-Cuban religions became employed as "cultural workers" and/or informants of cultural production within the national performance institutions (Vélez 2000, p 71) that were developed as a part of the state's efforts to create "strong support for artistic enterprises" (Vélez 2000, p. 72). What had existed as cultural practice with specific cultural and historical meaning in the popular sector was translated

into artistic culture as it became national folklore. As a result, Afro-Cubans were given an official position in national culture within this framework.

Prescribed notions of racial identity remained uncontested in new national frameworks. The creation of new national performance groups such as the *Conjunto Folklorico Nacional de Cuba* (CFN) joined the ranks of important national expression and culture but maintained racialized modes of national performance. Cubans of specific racial backgrounds were selected and funneled into corresponding forms of performance. Dark skinned dancers who wanted to pursue a professional career in the national ballet company were directed to performance realms in which their skin color would be more "acceptable" or in "character" with the cultural expression and artistic professionalism. Therefore, arts classified as "high culture" like ballet, remained entrenched within the classic models and continued to mimic old world standards of form, content, image, and physicality whereas realms of national folklore focused upon the development of popular Cuban culture and therefore the employment of dark skinned professionals in national culture. Jorge Duany comments on themes of racialization as they manifest in society: "racialization involves imputing a hereditary origin to certain intellectual, emotional, or behavioral characteristics of an individual based on group membership" (Duany 2006) The racial identity of aspiring dancers determined what artistic form they would be afforded opportunity to study and perform by the state. (interview notes 2005, Santiago de Cuba) It becomes clear that even though national performing arts had been expanded to encompass Afro-Cuban bodies and forms, the pre-existing molds and ideologies of cultural production remained uncontested.

These developments within Cuban society and the emergence of increased support from the state were bittersweet and subsequently the cause of conflict within Afro-Cuban religious communities of the *Abakuá, Palo*, and *Regla de Ocha* religions that had suffered severe repression historically. Older generations of Afro-Cuban religious practitioners worried that the publicity of their ceremonial rituals was sacrilegious and counter to the codes of secrecy that were/are strong in some these traditions. In addition, the recognition for the validity of Afro-Cuban identity within Cuban culture subjected these communities to alternative forms of state control regarding how, who, and in what social spheres Afro-Cuban ritual practice could take place.

This emphasis and focus upon Afro-Cuban culture within the restructuring of the Cuban nation is a process that has led to a controversial representation of black history and culture. As sacred Afro-Cuban traditions and history were incorporated into secular national constructions what was once sacred became secular. What had been preserved through the collective memory of communities was now part of the national image. The ritual practices of Afro-Cuban religions were becoming re-contextualized to fit national agendas in that certain elements of the religious practices became public spectacle such as the ceremonial music and dances of the *Orishas* (religious deities of the Afro-Cuban religion Regla de Ocha/Santería). In addition, other "religiously significant aspects of these traditions were excised from these representations, thus further removing these performances from the realm of everyday life" (Hagedorn 2000, p. 68). What was once spiritual had become theatrical. The construction of a public sphere in which these cultural expressions were allowed, respected, and interpreted relieved some of the

previous pressures characterized in the historical repression of these practices and moved beyond the modest acknowledgement of Afro-Cuban culture of the 1920's and 30's. Unfortunately, new constraints regarding the ways in which Afro-Cuban culture was understood and practiced only subjected these communities to alternative forms of state control that determined the specifics and form of national state performance and therefore new interpretations as to their significance, importance, and place in Cuban history.

The construction of new national performance arts and the transformation of popular culture and Afro-Cuban cultural practices into national folklore was a way in which the revolution could rewrite Cuban history. It opened national discourses to the transcultural nature of the Cuban people while extracting the spiritual essence from historical tradition. This concept is explored in Katherine Hagedorn's important work *Divine Utterances*, a text that coins the term and explores the processes of "folkorization" of Afro-Cuban ritual and cultural practice. Hagedorn investigates the overlap of ritual and performance in Afro-Cuban culture and examines how the distinctions between artistic cultural performance and Afro-Cuban religious rituals have become blurred. She explains "folklorization" in the following analysis of the *Conjunto Folklorico Nacional* (CFN) performances.

> these representations still employ the powerful communicative aspects of the ritual folk traditions: the songs, the dances, and the drumming. These folkloric performances as they are called, thus suggested the transformation from the folk to folkloric, a process of "folklorization," in which the religious practice that has been classified as folk tradition is reinterpreted and re-contextualized as a staged commodified folkloric performance (one that we might call secular) and yet still draws on the communicative inspiration of its folk (Hagedorn 2000, p.68).

In this discussion it is made apparent that opening discourses about Afro-Cuban culture and the striving to "stimulate folkloric traditions" (De la Fuente 2001, p. 268) of previously marginalized cultural practices creates a national culture in which Afro-Cubans were free to perform their blackness, cultural heritage, and African history. This attempt at the decolonization of the black experience in Cuba legitimized a space for Afro-Cuban representation in society. This however, failed to inspire discourse or inquiry into how years of oppression and discrimination shaped a racialized Afro-Cuban experience and defined the black Cuban experience. As a result, the state attempted to address the repression of Afro-Cuban culture and peoples without having to actually deconstruct the social ideologies and discourses that had supported racist social structures in Cuba for centuries. This approach to national discourse presents the danger and problem of embracing or celebrating cultural hybridity, a phenomenon that Young elaborates in the following:

> Hybridity (in our case *mestizaje*) in particular shows the connections between the racial categories of the past and contemporary cultural discourse: it may be used in different ways, given different inflections and apparently discrete references, but it always reiterates and reinforces the dynamics of the same conflictual economy whose tensions and divisions it re-enacts in its own antithetical structure…it changes as it repeats, but it also repeats as it changes (Young, 1995, p. 27).

This presents a duality in the notion of "progress" and/or "liberation" of Afro-Cuban sectors of society. The increased visibility of Afro-Cuban practices as a part of the artistic or cultural life of Cubans served to educate the Cuban populace about a culture that had been repressed and feared throughout Cuban history. This is evident in the case of Felipe García Villamil who was the director of a folkloric cultural performance group

in Matanzas, Cuba, a province that has played an important historical role in the preservation and practice of Afro-Cuban identity and culture. Felipe was a practitioner of several Yoruban based Afro-Cuban religions and viewed his work for the state as a "cultural worker" as an opportunity to combat the oppression suffered by practitioners and their traditions. "Felipe used his position to support using these performances as a means of educating the public, which in its way served to defend the Abakúa from the widespread prejudices" (Velez 2000, p. 83). Cultural workers like Felipe who are also practitioners of one or more Afro-Cuban religions were often criticized by those in their communities for breaching codes of secrecy like that of the Abakuá religion, which is a secret male society. As Afro-Cuban culture was promoted as national culture Afro-Cuban practices and religions had to change specific practices and traditions to fit the new public face of what was one practiced in secret. Although Afro-Cuban culture was embraced in the revolutionary period, aspects of ceremonial practice in civic spheres remained illegal. This contradiction was connected to revolutionary ideology spoken in Castro's words "todo adentro la revolucion, afuera nada/everything within the revolution is permitted, nothing from outside the revolution is permitted". Religious practice and spiritual faith was regarded as being in competition with civic allegiance to the all-important state, therefore the cultural practices of the Afro-Cuban spiritual traditions were acceptable within the national performance realms of artistic presentation but not as a practiced faith in the popular sector.

These new national cultural spheres, inclusive of black Cubans, embodied another contradiction in that they did not serve to question or obliterate existing racial ideologies. Social and cultural spheres of the arts that were characteristically white before the

revolution remained that way. As in the case of the birth of the national dance company *Conjunto Folklorico Nacional de Cuba* and *Danza Contemporanéa Nacional de Cuba*, new legitimized performance spaces of cultural and artistic expression were created that incorporated black Cubans and Afro-Cuban cultural expression into redefined concepts of national identity and spaces of "high" and "low" culture instead of incorporating them into already existing cultural spheres. The inclusion of black bodies and Afro-Cuban forms distracted the state from dealing with the internal workings and destruction of racism. The new state structures, while making strides towards greater equality and social acceptance for Afro-Cuban culture, also pushed divisive ideologies deeper into national consciousness by falsely addressing the social issue. Once again, Howe examines this topic:

> Black culture was paradoxically contained by a racial policy oriented toward a predictable curriculum of production. This policy contradicted socialist realism's tenets and severed black politics-that is, substantive issues such as racism-from cultural expression. As a result, authorities muted Afro-Cuban culture with a certain kind of aesthetic resonance (Howe 2004, p. 84).

It is these social spheres and secularized performance spaces in which Afro-Cuban culture was permitted and, in some respect, sought after that are most relevant for this thesis. In the same way that the revolution created a space for Afro-Cuban cultural practices within the process of redefining Cuban national identity and exemplifying national freedom, it also sought to manage these cultures in forms that were congruent with revolutionary ideologies and practices. The revolution stripped them of their historical position and identity in order to "stress a national-popular political definition or

the distinction of a cultivated taste with traditional roots" (Clanclini 1995, p. 154). The silencing of race and the prohibition of social alliance groups built upon concepts of racial solidarity were key components of the way in which the revolutionaries sought an end of racist rhetoric and practices of discrimination and exclusion that had defined and driven Cuban society during colonial rule. The "folklorization" stripped Afro-Cuban cultural practice of its principal function and historical importance. As issues and discourses of the black experience in Cuba were allocated to the stage and to artistic performance Afro-Cubans remained ostracized in a daily social context. This approach, while it may have created greater freedom and opportunity for black Cubans, falls short of an effective means to deconstruct racist practices and ideologies within the national context and achieve the goals of national unity and equality that the revolution holds so central to its existence.

After the revolution, renegotiating civic participation in national culture was central to redefining Cuba as a nation with a political vision that emphasized the social and physical welfare of the entire population. Drawing on a range of popular cultural arts as educational tools, the state set about to transform the "people's culture" into an official national culture that would erase class and racial divides and thus promote national solidarity. The incorporation of the popular culture of Afro-Cubans was vital to this effort.

In my analysis of the official arts of Cuba that were promoted during the national reconstruction project I have focused on dance, with an emphasis on the ideological shift from the 1930's. It was during the decade from 1923-1933, the period that set the stage for the *afrocubanismo* movement, that Afro-Cuban culture was incorporated into a

middle class framework. Thirty years later the focus shifted to producing national culture in its authentic and popular form; the performance of Afro-Cuban cultural practice on national stages aimed to legitimize the culture of the masses and create a symbolic image to convey and build national pride and solidarity.

As I have discussed, the efforts of the state to move these practices from the margins to the center of society were not without limitations. The form and function of Afro-Cuban cultural practices, as they existed in the popular realm, were altered as they became theatrical performances, a theme evident in the exploration of Katherine Hagedorn's term "folklorization" that describes the process by which popular culture becomes delineated as performed "folklore" in national performance. Even though discrimination based on race was deconstructed in national structures such as in literary works that discussed Cuban identity and the importance of the Afro-Cuban contribution and with the presentation of folkloric performances on the national stage, inherently racist social ideologies remained in daily interaction and culture. As a result, while the production of Afro-Cuban cultural practices was prevalent and revered in national performance spheres, the practice of these traditions remained illegal in the popular realm of society. For these reasons the celebration of popular culture as national culture was insufficient in dealing with deep-rooted social issues and problems. Stark contradictions remained in revolutionary Cuban society, including the racial bias and negative racial attitudes that had been prevalent in the post-colonial culture.

The next chapter focuses more specifically on the creation of a national modern dance form as an important part of the development of the Cuban performing arts. As it emerged after the triumph of the revolution, Cuban modern dance drew inspiration not

only from the hybrid identity of Cuba's culture and people, but also from a contemporary international arts movement that questioned the role of the arts in society.

NOTES:

[i] The diverse racial and cultural backgrounds of the Cuban people are a result of historical lineages of Spanish colonization and the trans-atlantic slave trade. The transnational history as well as civic and economic development of the Cuban nation has produced a hybrid identity that the revolutionary government has promoted as the focal point of Cuban national identity.

Chapter 2:

Danza Moderna: The Hybrid National Performance Art of Modern Day Cuba

Cuba, post 1959, is a nation of highly trained professional artists who have been afforded the opportunity to study and develop their talent in a way that supports the goals and ideologies of the revolution. There is a widespread appreciation and accessibility for creating, observing, experiencing, and studying visual, performance, and literary arts, which have been posited as important aspects of the education and formation of solidarity amongst the Cuban citizenry. In turn, the arts are an integral component of the modern identity of the nation and are formulated from the stories, experiences, and cultural practices of the Cuban people. They reflect many prominent characteristics and elements of Cuban culture as Cuba has progressed into modernity and redefined itself as an autonomous hybrid nation in the image of its people. Sylvia, a retired principal dancer of the original group that formed the first modern dance company in Cuba, *Conjunto Nacional de Danza Contemporánea*, commented in an interview on the function and prevalence of expressive movement and a dance aesthetic in the everyday lives of Cubans. She commented, "*Somos Cubanos, todo el mundo aqui baila por la vida cotidiana*/We are Cuban, the whole world here dances through everyday life" (Sylvia Interview, August 16, 2006). This comment is similar to that of the early modern dance artists of North America who claimed that everyday movement and expression is a dance. The strength of character and expressive quality of everyday interaction in Cuban life and culture is what is described by Sylvia and is what I noticed my first day on the island when I was taken aback by the distinct quality of daily interaction in *La Habana*/Havana.

As a result, Cuba has become known not only for its rich and diverse cultural arts as described in the previous chapter, but also a vibrant sense of character and performance quality that informs and defines these arts, which communicate the Cuban experience in national and international contexts.

In this chapter I examine the role of Cuban modern dance (termed *danza moderna* in Cuba), a dance form that was created and included as a part of the national cultural arts shortly after the triumph of the revolution. This was a period when the arts began to take on a new role and principal function in society. The interplay between notions of revolutionary artistic culture as they were defined by the revolutionaries, with the inception of a Cuban modern dance form and style, endeavored to honor and incorporate the Afro-Cuban heritage and contribution to Cuban identity and culture. This was done by combining Afro-Cuban spirituality and physical form with experimental modern dance techniques and philosophies developed in the first half of the 1900's in the United States. Here, I analyze the theoretical purpose and technical form of Cuban modern dance. This form embodies a mixture of stylistic and philosophical influences from the arts revolution of the United States with the incorporation of thematic aspects of Afro-Cuban history and identity. I argue that modern dance in Cuba was, and is, one of the nationally produced spaces that blurs the line between "high" and "low" cultures, a distinction made by historical paradigms that hold the cultures of the popular sectors where Afro Cuban cultural memory is prevalent as "low" culture in contrast with the "high" culture of the historically creole elite. *Danza moderna*, a national form that blends these cultural and historical distinctions embodies the quality, energy, and personal histories specific to the Cuban experience that aim to parallel Jose Marti's

humanistic rhetoric. This also includes Marti's national model in which all races and identities are celebrated and incorporated as a collective national identity. It is a national art form taken from the roots of Cuban culture and the cultural memory of the Cuban people, both European and African. The result is a social movement and codified national dance form that builds upon an international movement in dance tradition and artistic expression.

Before I discuss Cuban modern dance and its importance, I provide a brief discussion on the foundation of modern dance. This foundation is an integral part of an artistic and social revolution that took place in the United States. The social and artistic movements from which modern dance arose are all crucial to the voice of marginalized identities in the construction of the modern national model. This discussion and explanation will make clear the connection to the inspiration for and the social utility of *danza moderna* in revolutionary Cuba.

SECTION 1: From National to International: The History of Modern Dance in the Modernization of the Americas

From its inception, modern dance is a genre of experimental form and artistic expression that originated in the United States during the first half of the 20th century. The modern dance tradition embodied a movement to break free from colonial cultural models of European ballet in which erect, rigid movement and a classical body type were fostered for the performance of ballets of colonial European society. Brenda Dixon Gottschild explains that, "In traditional European dance aesthetics, the torso must be held upright for correct, classic form; the erect spine is the center~the hierarchical

ruler~from which all movement is generated. It functions as a single unit. The straight, uninflected torso indicates elegance or royalty and acts as the absolute monarch dominating the dancing body" (Gottschild 2003, p. 147). Modern dance choreographers contested the concept and lineage of dance in U.S. society as it had been previously understood. Early and contemporary modern dance choreography asserted the identity of a dancer as an artist rather than solely as an entertainer. Therefore, dance in the modern dance venue was an expressive and abstract art form that aimed to inspire social reflection and thought with regard to the diverse identities, cultures, and histories in U.S. society. This movement simultaneously involved provoking further inquiry of social norms and stratifications. Julia L. Foulkes explains the sentiment from which the modern tradition was born and the effort of dancers to change the role and function of dance and performed movement in society. "These dancers merged art and politics, finding ways to respond to social conditions and make political statements through dance. Giving new meaning and relevance to movement,….in their eyes ballet was a fantastical picture of femininity an alabaster imported from Europe, too elitist and foreign to speak to the American masses" (Foulkes 2002, p.15). Dancers expressed a desire to create something new that could speak to the multi-cultural identity and history of the United States nation.

The movement in the United States began with the effort and work of several artists. Isadora Duncan, Helen Tamaris, Ruth St. Denis, and Ted Shawn, the latter two a married couple, created the historically renowned Denishawn School of Dance in 1915 in Los Angeles, Califonia. These artistic pioneers are famous for their collective and individual work that challenged the role and function of dance in society. Ruth St. Denis claimed that dance had a principal role in history and culture because it facilitates the

connection of the human spirit to its intellect and people to one another. She stated the following:

> Let us, therefore, regard the dance fundamentally as Life Experience, as the primitive and ultimate means of expression and communication. Let us see in the free, spontaneous dance of every child the beginning of the universal language, and the universal art, which, largely unconscious to himself, grows bodily into words, telling of illusive and exquisite moments of the hidden self; and later flowers into forms of art that will heal the world of some of its artistic sins. (Brown, Mindlin, & Woodford 1979, p. 23).

In the late 1920's and early 1930's other important figures who studied with the original pioneers, most at the Denishawn school, began their own choreographic and technical experimentation. They sought expression that gave voice to the evolving inspirations of the era. Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, and Charles Weidman (the latter two who formed a dance company together) were among these important figures. They pushed the limits of what defined dance and physical expression through the production of choreographed works and experimental movement philosophies. This included abstract examinations of the function and significance of the body as moving through space. Codified movement techniques and diverse understandings of the body and its movement developed from these abstract investigations. These techniques and movement modality philosophies emphasized specific movement principles that grew out of the study of natural utility and function of the body and its inherent expressive nature.

The body became central to the expression of identity. National culture was at the forefront of the modern dance agenda as was the understanding of dance as an inherent quality within the human experience. In the words of Martha Graham, "To understand dance for what it is, it is necessary we know from whence it comes and where it goes. It

comes from the depths of man's inner nature, the unconscious, where memory dwells. As such it inhabits the dancer. It goes into the experience of man, the spectator, awakening similar memories" (Brown, Mindlin, & Woodford 1979, p. 50). Choreographers of modern dance (Graham and a expanding group of others) aspired to create the forms that spoke to the history, experience, and cultural memory of the American people as they "questioned their own roles in society, the role of art in America, and the place of America in the world" (Foulkes 1997, p.1). This cultural space from which artistic works and codified movement forms were created served as a foundation for modern dance techniques and choreographies that followed.

Let me digress from the principal question to examine two important aspects of my discussion: (1) the body as a principal tool of dancers and (2) the cultural and artistic explorations of modern dance artists. These attributes illustrate how and why the modern dance tradition became useful to non-mainstream identities and marginalized ethnic communities. This includes both national and international spheres where non-European participants criticized creative and political avenues. Jose Limón, an important artist in the modern dance tradition, quotes his teacher, Doris Humphrey, when he says,

> The dancer is fortunate indeed, for he has for his instrument the most eloquent and miraculous of all instruments, the human body. My teacher, Doris Humphrey, when I first came to her studio as an umpromising but dedicated beginner, told us something I have never forgotten. She said, "The human body is the most powerfully expressive medium there is….the body reveals. Movement and gesture are the oldest languages known to man. They are still the most revealing. When you move you stand revealed for what you are" (Brown, Mindlin, & Woodford 1979, p. 100).

Principal characteristics of the modern dance genre focus on the inherent expression of the body and cultural memory as it is performed through gesture and

movement. The results are the development of a fluid, cyclical, and grounded movement vocabulary that contrasts with the upright, rigid and seemingly weightless balletic form. The understanding of the physical construction of shapes in modern dance is based upon the physical rendition of abstract social concepts combined with the use of functional and/or abstract pedestrian movement. Therefore the modern dance aesthetic, generally speaking, is preoccupied with the production of shapes and lines in a manner that differs from the highly specific balletic form. Ballet is regimented in order to attain a strong but equally delicate aesthetic quality in which a specific body prototype is deemed appropriate and necessary. The modern aesthetic on the other hand, is concerned more with lines and forms that communicate an idea and energetic quality. This is intended to provoke self-reflection, social commentary, and the connection to cultural and social context. Whether or not the forms and bodies within modern dance choreography are "pretty" or aesthetically pleasing is of lesser importance to the communication of the central idea and social commentary of the work (Folkes 2002).

Martha Graham's was the first American modern dance company that performed a repertory of works in international spheres, connecting the growing modern arts/social movement to the inspiration of arts communities beyond national boundaries. Many foreigners and Americans alike traveled to New York City to study in Graham's dance school, as well as within schools of other important modern dance artists, facilitating the growth of the arts movement on a national and international scale. New choreographies treated abstract ideas of identity and human existence in the modern world in a way that contested the social ideologies and discourses that were imbedded in colonial frameworks. The abstract character of modern dance paved the way for dancers to

question and experiment with social inquiry, emotion, and concepts of identity as well as contest previously understood notions of the "national". The performance of social commentary through modern dance produced a non-verbal dialog that contested history and cultural memory as it had been studied and understood previously in a Euro-centric model.

Diversity and divergence from the mainstream within the modern dance era opened the doors for marginalized populations to use the art form. People articulated their cultural and social contributions to national culture through expression that previously had no place in professional dance performance. Modern dance allowed artistic pioneers in the movement to enter into an international arts dialog and contribute new perspectives regarding national culture and history. Several pioneers of African American modern dance were at the forefront of this movement. They used the creative, social, and political platform established by the modern dance tradition as a means to explore and study the African American heritage and civic contribution in the making of the modern day citizen in U.S. nationalism. This foreshadows what was to evolve later in Cuba where artists, supported and managed by the Cuban state, explored Afro-Cuban contributions to national Cuban culture through a framework and structure of national performance arts. (a topic I will investigate in greater detail later in the second section of the chapter). The following citation from Susan Manning's book *Modern Dance Negro Dance, Race in Motion* speaks to the historical and social environment that set the stage for the involvement of black dancers and African American themes in American modern dance. She states the following:

> Despite formidable odds, African American dancers persisted in staging works that followed Cox's dictum of presenting dance not as a diversion but as an expression of life. Reacting against stereotypes that had descended from black and blackface minstrelsy –the female wench, the male dandy, and the male buffoon-Negro dancers also reacted against the signifying that earlier African-American artists had deployed in order to defuse such stereotypes. Rather, Negro dancers experimented with a range of alternate strategies for performing blackness, framing their works as modernist abstraction, dramatic narrative, imagined ritual, social protest, theatricalizations of vernacular forms. Their works were premised on black bodies referencing black subjects. After 1940 this convention became an established protocol on the American stage, and thus it is difficult to fathom the historical moment of the 1930's when the self-representation of blackness was an emergent convention in American theater dance (Manning 2004, p. 9).

Pioneering participants in the African American sector of performance in U. S. society included Edna Guy: as an artist, Guy had undying persistence of becoming a modern dancer/performer. She ultimately broke the mold of the black dancer/performer as one limited to vernacular dance. She was the first black participant to study at the Denishawn School in the 1920's after having been rejected from other dance schools due to discriminatory racial attitudes and policies that excluded her because she was African American. She performed in school dance productions but again racist attitudes and norms prevented her from being featured in any public performances produced by the artists and teachers at Denishawn. She persevered and became a central figure in the organization of performance events where black performers and African American choreographies were featured providing budding African American artists with a place to exhibit their work publicly.

Pearl Primus was another dance pioneer that emerged in the 1930's. She was born in Trinidad but raised in the U.S. She viewed "dance as medicine" (Urban Bush

Women 2007, UCSD Mandeville Theatre Performance Program) to the human experience. This perspective and statement is an assertion of the truth that through dance, humans have the opportunity to better understand and communicate who we are, freeing us from the social ailments that constrict us. Her academic focus in psychology and anthropology led her to do ethnographic research as a participant-observer in both Africa and the U.S. Southeast. She examined African ritual and community practices, as well as the transculturation of African traditions and culture in the diasporic communities of African Americans. Her research and social investigations informed the creation of her choreographed works, which tell the untold histories of African American communities and provide a means through which African Americans can tell their stories. She is particularly famous for the choreographies *Strange Fruit* and *Hard Times Blues*. These works address the psychology and practice of lynching in the South, one of the many violent realities that left a scar on African American and greater U.S. history.

Another central figure in the African American community who blended ethnographic research and the American modern dance tradition is the recently deceased dancer, anthropologist, choreographer, and dance company director Katherine Dunham. She, like Primus, broadened her understanding of African American culture by examining its role as part of the larger Black Atlantic transnational community. Dunham traveled and conducted participant-observation research in Jamaica and Haiti. These are nations and cultures where dance plays a central role in ceremonial practices and community structures. Dunham produced a myriad of choreographed works, concert productions, and performative displays of culture upon her return to the United States. She also developed the Dunham dance technique. This is a technical movement

philosophy and form that stems from the quality and character of movement and expression of the African diaspora. In her technique "the absorption of black stance and gesture" (Long 1995, p.8) is blended with classically based forms of modern dance technique and balletic theories of coordination.

The presentation of one of Dunham's company performances introduced and inspired Alvin Ailey to begin his career as a modern dancer. Ailey was an African American dancer, choreographer, and director of the well renowned Alvin Ailey dance company. Ailey drew his inspiration for his work from his experiences and what he calls "blood memories" (Grimm 1986, DVD) of growing up in Texas as an African American in an inherently racist nation. One of his cornerstone works is entitled "Revelations". It depicts pertinent images of the U.S. Southern Spiritual culture, a vital and energetic part of African American culture and history. His goal was to transmit the beauty and elegance of his people and culture through a creative agency of the modern dance discipline.

The ethnographic exploration and investigation of transnational culture and social identity evident in the work of the pioneers described above is central to the investigation and performance of modern American identities in the modern dance tradition. These kinds of performances and artistic inquiry reorganized modern national identities. Similarities emerged in the artistic creations and dance techniques that were produced nationally and internationally as artists and ethnographers like Primus, Dunham, and Ailey crossed state and national boundaries to investigate the social practices, cultural contexts, and ancestral lineages of movement, expression, and cultural identity. The

work of these artists emphasized the social functions and context of modern dance and its importance to national dialogs and identity structures.

Dancers in the modern dance tradition in both the United States and in international contexts such as Cuba, became what I refer to as "technicians of space" (Dinzy-Flores 2006, LASA Panel Presentation). They entered and transformed social and national performance spaces to provoke social inquiry of previously understood concepts of national identity. The dancers questioned historical social discourses surrounding national identity and the roots of national culture. The proscenium stage and the dancer's body were the tools and the mechanisms of the artists and marginalized communities through which new concepts of national history, national identity, and social cultural memory were communicated.

The occupation and reconfiguration of performance spaces was crucial to the modern dance tradition, the work of these technicians of space, and the political struggle of the marginalized masses. The performance of culture in specific sites became a means to assert an autonomous identity as a people that physically and culturally contributed to the idea of the modern nation. Joseph Roach explores this concept in his investigation of the "performance-saturated inter-culture of New Orleans". In an essay entitled *Deep Skin* he examines the historical and social significance of Congo Square in New Orleans, the historical site where slaves during institutionalized slavery were permitted once a month to play drums and dance. The public square now exists as a cultural attraction and historical site that has served to preserve the roots and history of African American culture.

In the essay Roach examines the significance of skin color and its relation to ethnicity and cultural practice in national spheres of identity and public performance. He examines Congo Square as an example of a social space/site in which culture and identity is publicly performed in displaying cultural memory that is inherent in the history of the nation and its people. He asserts that the public performance of culture results in the recognition and validation of the myriad of cultural influences defined within the national. It is through the transformation of public space to performance space that social groups can come to know and respect the practices of the other. In his concluding paragraph, Roach calls for further investigation of social spaces where identity and history are performed, and the impact such spaces have upon public perceptions/constructions of national identity and culture.

> what is needed at this moment is a heightened awareness of the city of New Orleans-and other American cities- as a repository of performances of great beauty and historic significance of which every citizen can be proud. African–descended traditions are central among these forms….In this contest between places and environments of memory the name 'Congo Square' has come to represent not only the preservation of inspiring memories of Africa and the diaspora but even more important the revitalization of African ways of remembering. If they were to grow into general use, chances are that all peoples would come to understand themselves better as a result (Elam & Krasner 2001, p. 112).

The comments and critical discourse of Joseph Roach can be understood in the phrase "the revitalization of African ways of remembering". Dance and music have gained recognition as important components of cultural exploration and a means through which individuals, social groups, and ethnic communities negotiate identity and history. It is this "remembering" of the African diasporic experience, and way of preserving and

restructuring culture and identity from which the Cuban modern dance tradition *(danza moderna)* emerged.

The performance of modern dance choreographies is relevant here in that the creation of modern dance works are founded within the specific energetic quality and emotion of socially relevant movement and gesture. Dance, a facet of community life, is used in specific communities to communicate with the spiritual world, express ethnic identity, and communicate/celebrate significant events and traditions. The investigation and recognition of the role that dance (and physical expression) played in non-European societies was integral in the development of modern dance choreography and philosophy. In the modern dance era, dance and performance had become not only a means to examine the essence of human existence, social politics and evolving notions of national identity, they had also become part of the inquiry into the legacy of marginalized populations whose cultural and physical contributions were omitted from dominant social discourses and performance spheres. Modern dancers examined the role and purpose of dance in historical and contemporary perspectives to create artistic social commentary. In short, modern dance contributed to the greater understanding of national identity as a complex composite of people and cultures. It is within this context that the artistic emphasis and social focus of the modern dance tradition became useful in the search for greater autonomy in post-colonial societies. The bodies of the dancers operate as "technicians of space" in these types of political and social contexts. Dancers physically occupy new spaces in the national production of culture and embody the goals of modern autonomy.

It is clear that the modern dance tradition transformed the proscenium stage from a space of entertainment to that of exploration where artists and dancers could experiment with the power of their artistic voice, creative inspiration, and cultural identity. This was informed by expanding notions of cultural history. The artists, their choreographed works, and the questions they asked became the basis of an artistic social revolution that was taking place across the U.S., Europe, and Latin America. The outlook of future artistic endeavors became invested in the kind of ethnographic inquiry/study seen in the work of the pioneers and a second generation of modern dance artists. These artists continued to challenge the perception of culture and the social function of movement in national society. Expressive gesture, cultural practice, and the interpretation of the physical labor of working peoples were all included in modern dance choreographies and theories of the social function and purpose of movement. The social commentary made through dance gave birth to a vibrant international arts movement where the body and its inherent gesture have become the basis for the reorganization of national history and modern civic society.

SECTION 2: *Danza Moderna*: The emergence of a Cuban modern dance form and its official state recognition

The connection between performance of identity and the role it plays specifically in the modern dance tradition and artistic social movement leads me to my next point of inquiry. I turn now to analyze the Cuban modern dance form, *danza moderna*. This is a performance art genre and dance vocabulary specific to Cuba that was molded from the combination of the influence of U.S. technique and Afro-Cuban inspired gesture. The

goal with *danza moderna* was to bring attention to the hybrid quality of modern Cuban citizenry and culture and traverse previous societal definitions of "high" and "low" culture that remained from colonial social frameworks. In this section I examine how modern dance became an important and unique part of the official national culture of revolutionary Cuba.

Artists in the U.S. and political revolutionaries in Cuba had both recognized the power of the arts to be a legitimate and effective voice of a modern national identity. In both social movements and political platforms the connection of artistic inquiry with national identity was a central element of communicating contemporary concepts of the modern nation and citizenry. In the case of Cuba, the arts were of the utmost importance in the assertion and establishment of the socialist national culture that defines a modern autonomous Cuba. Significantly, the arts were placed under the supervision and control of the Cuban state. Both artistic and political social movements aspired to socially relevant public performance that broadened public performance spaces to include peoples, communities, and cultural practices that had been previously omitted from conversations of national identity. Social stratifications were rejected along with national discourse and ideology that based acceptable artistic expression within models that had roots in the colonial paradigm. National expression began to embody the diverse identities and cultural roots of North America in the United States and Cuban in Cuba. In the same way that modern dance in the U.S. labored to open a social space within the arts for the marginalized and repressed identities, *danza moderna* in Cuba served a social purpose in the revolution as a contemporary art form that could be molded to reflect the revised national rhetoric.

This being said, there is an important distinction regarding the difference between the modern dance tradition of the United States and that which emerged in Cuba after 1959. In U.S. modern dance, the dancers and artists themselves challenged the status quo and defined the foundation and evolution of the modern social movement. In the development of *danza moderna* in Cuba the pioneers of the art form had to adhere to the parameters that were determined by the state as being relevant and important. In the case of U.S. modern dance it was members of the community that took it upon themselves to investigate and research culture and create artistic representations of cultural memory, as well as the performance venues in which these choreographies and social histories were performed. In Cuba, the state controlled which aesthetic forms and historical perspectives were nationally legitimate and thus, who and in what manner participants could collaborate in national performance productions. Artistic license and exploration that went beyond state guidelines was castigated and expelled from national participation.

The modern dance dialogs and the impetus for their inception in the United States framed dance and theatrical performance as social inquiry, investigation, and reflection. This mirrored the agenda of the Cuban revolution and the political role of the national performance arts in Cuba. These similarities present questions about the welcoming of a U.S. based dance form in Cuba after 1959 when all aspects of U.S. culture were being actively expelled from Cuban culture and society. This was an effort to rid the revolutionary society of any signs and/or influences of imperialism. In the previous chapter I explored the work and purpose of the reconfiguration of the national arts in Cuba as being "Destacar la importancia social, educativa, politica, ideological, recreativa del arte como una arma eficaz contra el imperialismo y en la lucha por la construción del

socialismo/to emphasize the social, educational, political, ideological, reconstructive importance of the arts as an effective weapon against imperialism and in the struggle of socialism" (del Carmen Hernandez 1980, p. 152). Cuba was adamant to extract U.S. cultural influences from national Cuban culture. *Danza moderna* was an exception to this rule. It was one part of Cuban revolutionary culture that welcomed and actively sought out inspiration, influence, and teachings from the international modern dance community of the north.

Like the integration and nationalization of popular and folkloric dance forms in national performance spheres, *danza moderna* was an integral part of re-contextualizing the African contribution to Cuban culture and history. It intended to combine Afro-Cuban gesture, movement, energetic quality, and rhythms with a structured/technical dance form and vocabulary. This process linked the representation of Afro-Cuban tradition and practice with aspects of classically based forms and concepts of "high culture". It is my contention that this was an effort to blur the lines between art and folklore in order to make one of the other and both of the national. As stated in Linda Howe's book *Transgression and Conformity; Cuban Writers and Artists after the Revolution*, "Ramiro Guerra combined Martha Graham's modern dance approach with the Lucumí legend, making possible syncretic performances of traditional religious dance reinterpreted through experimental dance theory and choreography" (Howe 2004, p. 74). The emergence of *danza moderna* as a national form transformed the social spheres within which Afro-Cuban expression and movement was prevalent. It also increased the performance spaces in which black Cubans were legitimized and esteemed as

professionals. The state positioned Afro-Cuban culture and identity within discourses of national identity and popular solidarity in a context apart from national folklore.

As we have seen, modern dance as a genre of artistic exploration, expanded and reconfigured pre-existing notions of "high" and "low" culture in Cuba through more accurate social representation and civic participation in cultural artistry. No longer was art meant for the appreciation by an elite population nor was it a representation of an elite or "high" culture aesthetic. It served the purpose of blending forms that were based in both classic and popular representations therefore blending what had been classified as categories of "high" and "low" culture. The modern dance tradition of Cuba continued this inquiry in that its development was based on a political platform that strived to close the divide between popular/traditional practices and classically based forms of dance, thus closing the divide between distinctions of high and low culture. It became a form that spoke specifically to the Cuban experience and joined the fervor of the artistic revolution that was expanding in international spheres. We see the social value of distinct artistic expression that embodies the national quality and form expressed by Rex Nettleford in his essay "Jamaican Dance Theatre: Celebrating the Caribbean Heritage".

> Caribbean dance, like other definitive genres of artistic expression, is demonstrably capable of multiple and interactive modes of expression, better perceived and described as *ancestral/traditional*, *Contemporary/popular*, and *classic.* Just as Europe deeply mined its own national (ancestral/traditional) dances and lore and its popular expressions emerging from the urban streets, as well as mannered "indulgences" at court, to create European classical ballet, the Caribbean for some half a century has been forging out of its traditional lore, for the concert stage, what can be called a classical mode. These dances all share common elements (Nettleford 2002, p. 84).

The incorporation of traditional forms in modern constructions of identity is part of a desire and need to give new meaning and marketability to the "popular" in the modern Latin American and Caribbean nations, as well as redefine the parameters of what is considered and classified as national lore.

To define the nation in a way that differentiates it from previous definitions of the colonial paradigm in an effort to celebrate the national culture, identity, and historical legacy of the Latin American and Caribbean people on their own terms is what was posited at the forefront of national modern artistic inquiry. The creation of a national Cuban modern dance form and technique was similar to the modern artistic productions of other Caribbean nations at the time. As nations of the Caribbean reached independence from colonial rule they strived to assert distinctly national qualities that expressed a modern autonomous identity. In the case of Cuba, *danza moderna* represents the concerted effort to create a new and contemporary artistic representation of Cuban culture and the Cuban people that expresses the modern hybrid identity of the nation by incorporating the popular in the realm of the national. Nestor Canclini, in his book *Hybrid Cultures*, notes this incorporation of the popular in the building of modern national identities and the blurring of classifications of "high" and "low" cultures as they have been previously understood. The following excerpt from his writings illustrates the importance of the inclusion of the popular in the national and the ideology behind the inclusion of concepts and elements of folklore in modern national production.

> Both transformations of popular cultures and those of high art coincide in demonstrating the heterogeneous implementation of the modernizing project in our continent, the diverse articulation of the liberal rationalist model with ancient aboriginal traditions, with Catholic colonial hispanism,

> and with each country's own socio-cultural developments (Canclini 1995, pp. 182).

Canclini makes evident the integral role of "folklorization" as it was defined and explored in chapter one. In the effort to reconfigure contemporary concepts of modern autonomous culture, the inclusion of indigenous and African diasporic populations and culture in the "recovering" of national folklore has been central to re-legitimize the contributions to national historical culture that had been ignored and muffled in previous historical periods. It is evident in the case of revolutionary Cuba that cultural practice and the body politic were a central focus of the state as it attempted to define the nation as an all-inclusive autonomous body politically, economically, and culturally. This rejected the prevailing notions of the post-colonial oppressive paradigm. The modern dance tradition is a pivotal element in this effort to blend and redefine categories of "high" and "low" culture and broaden the spectrum in which these classifications are made as well as shed light on how they have been understood historically and socially. It is within this process of social and political re-organization through public performance that the reconstruction of identity takes place and national social categories are expanded and explored. Thus, with the expansion, redefinition, and subsequent diversification of national performance production models came the redefinition of national identity and thus greater autonomy from the imperialist and colonial structures.

The "folklorization" of Afro-Cuban culture is evident in the development of national folkloric companies, like the *Conjunto Folklorico Nacional de Cuba.* The principal work of these national companies (see chapter one) is the theatricalized re-productions of Afro-Cuban cultural practice in which dance and music of Afro-centric

religious ritual is performed as national folklore. *Danza moderna* is part of the effort to close the gap between traditional, modern, and folkloric notions of identity and classifications of popular concepts of *la cultura cubana* that encompass what is considered to be of "high" or "low" culture. The focus in *danza moderna* on the hybrid nature of the body politic and cultural history as a defining element of the national brings the elite or "high" culture legacy of the colonial creoles and the lore or "low" culture of the African diasporic folk together in one national form, whereas other national performance forms focus specifically upon the production of one aspect of the diverse Cuban culture.

> These creators defied the dichotomy of high and low culture and called into question the binary opposition of folklore. Afro-Cuban culture, ethnological in orientation, became artistically sophisticated culture (aestheticized and "modernized") as an integral aspect of revolutionary national culture (Howe 2004, p. 74).

Cuba looked forward to redefine itself in a contemporary revolutionary context as a modernized nation that produced and defined its own Latin American/Caribbean identity. Here definitions of "high" and "low" culture not only blur but also contest the focus on non-European cultural practice that was central to contemporary national forms. I move now to examine the process by which *danza moderna* took shape and form within the institutionalized structures of the revolution.

Ramiro Guerra, a graduate of law school and a dancer, was the first to create a Cuban modern dance form and national company. "In searching for the Cuban way, Ramiro Guerra unlocked the path for other dancers and is recognized in Cuba as the founder of Cuban modern dance." (Mousouris 2002, p. 56.) He sought to release the

potential and unique character of the Cuban body and its movement in the search for quality and form that set Cuban movement apart from the artistry and cultural expression of other cultures. Primarily trained in the dance techniques from the schools of Martha Graham and José Limón during his travels to the United States prior to the revolution, Guerra expanded his inspiration for the national company and structure of the dance technique in his collaboration with the Mexican dancer/choreographer, Elena Noriega, as well as several other U.S. born dancers/artists including Lorna Burdsall, and Elfrida Mahler who had studied under the influences of Doris Humphrey, Jose Limón, and Martha Graham. These artists were technically trained during the height and fervor of the modern dance era in the United States and were staunch supporters of the Cuban revolution that posited the cultural productions of the Cuban people as a reflection of the national culture. Melinda Mousouris examines the artistic and historical legacy of Guerra in an interview she conducted with him. Guerra himself speaks to the way in which this international collaborative work helped him to find a Cuban quality and create a Cuban dance technique that had origins in the universal modern dance genre but that was specific to Cuban identity and culture.

> When I worked with Graham, I thought I was deficient at first. But then I realized that Cubans have something different in our bodies. We are not angular and set. The Cuban feeling is anarchic, emotional, improvisational-as in life. Perhaps we are more open to discover physical possibilities and more adaptable to dynamic changes….Working with Elena's experiments spurred me to work guided by my own personal experience. In creating technique I gave special treatment to oppositions that I consider to be the spiritual base and way of dancing of Cuban people (Mousouris 2002, p. 64).

It is evident from Guerra's comments that locating a Cuban vitality that is inherent within the cultural and physical hybrid Cuban history and experience was

a central component in the effort to build a Cuban modern dance technique and inspire the Cuban dancing body. It was the essence and existential experience of *la cultura cubana* that he wanted to understand, capture, and codify in the making of a modern dance specific to Cuba.

Supported by the Cuban state and the national mandate to open educational opportunities for all Cuban citizens and connect the workings of the state to popular culture, Guerra recruited dancers from the nightclub cabarets, amateur schools of ballet, and others with diverse dance training. He selected a group of 24 dancers from auditions. This included 12 light skinned and 12 dark skinned dancers equally divided by gender. This group would later become *Danza Contemporánea Nacional de Cuba,* the first modern dance company of Cuba (Lorna Burdsall Interview, August 9, 2005). With the help and expertise of the previously mentioned U.S. artists, as well as other professional dancers from Cuba who showed interest in the project, he sought the means to train and mold the dancers. He used the cultural backgrounds and life experiences of each participant as material and inspiration for the creation of the Cuban modern dance artistry in order to make the power of the art an expression of the human experience.

> He recognized the different cultural heritages of his dancers and sought opportunities to use the possibilities of each one. This group began to study how the Cuban body moved, what made it different from bodies in other cultures, and what its movement could express….Under Guerra's direction the cross fertilization of the dancers' different backgrounds and capabilities occurred and the company realized an arresting common aesthetic in their productions (Mousouris 2004, p. 57).

In the collaborative creation of the *danza moderna* movement technique Guerra drew upon his own training in ballet and the pivotal work of the modern dance pioneers from the U.S. whose teachings, movement philosophies, and artistic personalities heavily influenced the technical approach he used.

Guerra was interested in exploring the cultural roots of Cuban movement, a theme that had become all important in the rebirth of a "unified" modern Cuban nation. He incorporated Afro-Cuban form and gesture as it collided with Spanish heritage in his search for the unique qualities in the personality and physique of the Cuban dancer. His artistic approach is described in the following quote.

> The raw ingredients were: the theoretical base of the German school that grounds dance in the movements of daily life and establishes the dancer as choreographer of his/her own body; its direct expression of the embedded quality of dance, song, and instrumental music in Afro-Cuban movements; the modern dance techniques of North America; and the discovery of isolations that perfected Afro-Cuban movement (Mousouris 2002, p. 63).

Guerra's search for a new Cuban form paralleled a quest for the roots of culture and identity that the Cuban people had been denied during the colonial and post-colonial periods. He and others wanted dance to not only represent but also actively participate in the reconfiguration of the identity of the nation. He wanted to create something that was fresh and vital or as Sylvia, one of the principal dancers in the original modern dance company, described as "verde/green" (Sylvia Interview August 16, 2006). He and his collaborators worked to revitalize the image of the nation in the eyes of the Cuban people and revolutionary society in a way that inspired self-reflection and incorporation of the voices that were previously left out of the conversation.

The new modern dance of Cuba was posited as an exploration of the diverse historical roots of Cuban culture and society in an effort to incorporate all aspects of Cuban heritage in the contemporary definitions of the modern national project. As described in del Carmen Hernandez's book (published by the ministry of culture) the impetus for the creation of a modern dance performance art was described as "*la busqueda de la unidad entre el contenido y la forma de la manera que refleje la realidad Cubana*/ the search for unity between content and form in a manner that would reflect Cuban reality" (del Carmen Hernandez 1980, p. 132). In this search for the roots of Cuban culture, *danza moderna* became yet another space in the national arts of the revolutionary period in which blackness and an element of the cultural memory of the "folk" was recognized, investigated, and emphasized. It was an integral part of the re-interpretation of Cuban culture and national identity as a transcultural society. It is an art form that draws aspects of the technical foundation of classical dance and theories of movement from Europe while simultaneously incorporating gesture and movement of Afro-Cuban cultural practice and Afro-centric form to contest the previous images and narrow concepts of Cuban identity.

The incorporation of black bodies into a national dance company other than that of the *Conjunto Folklorico Nacional* was important to revolutionary rhetoric and the artistic depiction of Cuban nationalism. In addition, the development of a Cuban modern dance technique that stylistically, energetically, and thematically draws upon the existential Afro-Cuban identity, cultural practice, and experience was important in that it was aligned with the new cultural standards of the national restructuring project. In this way, dance, specifically *danza moderna* or Cuban modern dance becomes the primary

mechanism through which Afrocubanism in contemporary Cuban culture is expressed. The impetus to create a modern dance form, national company, artistic works, and national dance school that incorporate Afro-Cuban cultural representation are all parts of the process of "folklorization". This is emphasized by Linda Howe:

> Artists used diverse techniques, traditional religious ceremony, and avant-garde aesthetics to erase the border between the purely secular presentation and sacred practices popular among Afro-Cuban religious communities. Hermetic and clandestine religious elements of Cuban society were brought to the forefront as aesthetic manifestations of Cuban nationalism (Howe 2004, p. 74).

As we can see in Howe's statements the Afro-Cuban contribution to national Cuban culture had become something symbolic in the rhetoric and cultural manifestations of the revolutionary society and politics but many questions and criticism remain as to how this rhetoric permeates Cuban society and social practice on the civic level. Even though the revolution paved the way and encouraged the exploration and celebration of Afro-Cuban culture it maintained tight control over the way in which blackness and/or Afro-Cuban identity informed national performance, modern dance being of no exception to this control. The heavy hand of the state dictated all artistic foci in the official cultural arts and therefore the way in which Afro-Cuban culture could be interpreted, acknowledged, and performed in greater Cuban society, thus prohibiting citizens from defining Afro-Cuban culture and history for themselves.

Eduardo Rivero, the artistic director and founder of the national modern dance company *Compañía Teatro de la Danza del Caribe* in Santiago de Cuba, was one of the original members of *Danza Contemporánea Nacional de Cuba* and one of the first group of students to attend the national school. Rivero had dreamed of becoming a dancer from

childhood, he describes it as his *"sueño dorado/*adored dream" (Eduardo Rivero Interview, September 6, 2005) and attributes his opportunity to study and pursue a career in the arts post 1959 as a privilege provided to him by the social justice and equalization efforts of the revolution. He is a light skinned black man of Jamaican descent from a well educated but poor family. He benefited from the revolution's attempts to equalize society and open public spaces and professional opportunities for poor blacks. This included participation in arts, higher education, and professional realms where Blacks had previously been prohibited by economic realities as well as political and social prejudices. He states that the roots of inspiration for his adult professional work were the universal modern dance technique, the national *danza moderna* technique, and the transnational African diasporic elements of Cuban culture and history. Much of his principal repertory is a product of his investigation of the cultures of the West African nations as they existed before slavery, before Africans were abducted from their homelands and displaced as slaves to the New World. His desire to look back to the roots of Afro-Cuban culture as it existed in Africa was inspired by his teachers Ramiro Guerra, Lorna Burdsall, Elfrida Mahler, and Elena Noriega at the inception of modern dance in Cuba. They had examined the existential manifestation of displaced peoples, cultures, and historical traditions in Cuba through the investigation of cultural practices of the hybrid Cuban experience. Rivero wanted to take this cultural investigation one step further to examine the origin of the hybrid Cuban culture and root it in Africa.

Rivero reveals the importance of a historical artistic inquiry and comprehensive investigation of social culture and identity within national Cuban arts. He comments upon the influence of the international modern dance tradition whose social purpose and

inspiration has acted as a thread that runs through the African diasporic nations as each has worked to develop a modern day artistic representation of. His comments shed light on the transnational character of the Cuban modern dance form and the shared inspiration of African diasporic populations in the United States, Cuba, and the greater Caribbean. Dance was a means to reassert the marginalized voices and histories of African peoples within national discourses of culture and identity.

> *"Siempre me han dicho lo que hago se aparece de Alvin Ailey pero yo no estudiaba Alvin Ailey….Por ejemplo cuando yo vi a "Revelations" me di cuenta que si, tienen muchos elementos y son muy parecidos, muy iguales pero no porque yo he querido de ser. Porque yo he hecho de la danza moderna universal. Cuando digo universal digo Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Jose Limón y todos estos personajes que son personajes de la danza moderna universal, y ademas Alvin Ailey porque es Afro- Norte Americano, entonces yo hago elementos de mi de lo que yo conozco como de lo Afro-Cubano y se lo aplico a la danza, yo lo aplico a lo que yo estudié que tiene elementos de todo, aparte de ballet y mucho foklor.*
>
> Always they have told me that what I do is similar to that of Alvin Ailey, but I have not studied the work of Alvin Ailey…..For example when I saw Revelations" (a famous choreographed work of Alvin Ailley) I realized that, yes, they have many similar elements and are very alike, but not because I wanted them to be. Because I have made works from the universal modern dance form, when I say universal I mean Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Jose Limón, and all of these personalities that are personalities of the universal modern dance, and furthermore Alvin Ailey because he is Afro-North American. I make elements of myself, of what I know, like that of the Afro-Cuban elements and I apply them to the dance, I apply that which I studied which has elements of everything apart from ballet and a lot of folklore (Eduardo Rivero Interview, September 6, 2006).

Rivero's comments reveal that the development of *danza moderna* in Cuba proved important to the exploration of Afro-Cuban culture as it interacted with greater Cuban culture. *Danza moderna* played a role in the national impetus to "rescue", validate, and popularize the African roots within contemporary notions of *la cultura*

cubana. It brought the margins forward to the forefront of national culture. Artists appropriated forms of vernacular culture and re-interpreted them in the context of *danza moderna* as part of the search for social meaning of contemporary forms within the historical Afro-Cuban cultural framework. More importantly, the modern Cuban nation aspired to define the nation as an accurate reflection of the Cuban people/*pueblo* and the collective experience of all the nation's peoples. The experience of the Afro-Cubans was a central focus due to the large representation of such peoples throughout Cuban society and culture that had been historically omitted from national conversations. The historical cultural memory preserved in Cuban arts also serves as a cultural link between the nations of the Americas. In the post colonial era, as nations attempted to redefine themselves as autonomous and independent, the assertion of the modern national project that *danza moderna* and the official cultural arts are a part of is evident transnationally.

Rivero infers that the development of a Cuban modern dance form was an integral part of the "folklorization" of national culture and identity. The expansion of the cultural arts to encompass Afro-Cuban cultural expression and history was a part of the state-managed attempt to develop a new sense of popular identification and pride. This stressed the importance of identifying national culture as a reflection of the Cuban masses, especially those whose ethnicity and cultural identity had been shunned and criminalized prior to the revolution. The state recognized the importance of making the practices of the people a focus. This not only positioned popular culture at the forefront of the modern national identity, but it also brought it under closer surveillance of the state which decided what practices were appropriate and important to national state values.

As discussed previously, the efforts to bring the popular into the realm of the national were not without their complications or shortcomings; the modern dance tradition and development being no exception to this reality. The celebration of Afro-Cuban culture and people had reached the proscenium stage but was yet to permeate greater Cuban society and culture. The performance arts, modern dance specifically, had become the national spaces in which Cuban identity was negotiated. This added to the heightened importance and prestige of the performer and artist in Cuban society and nationalism. As black bodies and Afro-Cuban culture gained importance on the proscenium stage, negotiations of Cuban identity and the Afro-Cuban contribution struggled to surpass this arena. Although black bodies and history had gained importance and recognition in the cultural arts, there was a clear disconnect with regard to the restructuring of social ideologies that remained entrenched in racist practices of the past. Further efforts to deconstruct and dismantle the deeply rooted racist ideologies of the political and social psyche of the nation continue to be necessary in contemporary Cuban society and culture. This is a theme that I investigate in greater detail in the final chapter of the thesis.

It is clear that the assertion of a modern identity in which all sectors of society are valued emphasizes the expansion and reconstruction of previously understood parameters of the national and cultural realms of Cuban society. Definitions of terms such as nationhood, national culture, and historical ethnicity were important topics as Cuba re-defined post-colonial ideologies and underwent immense changes with the revolutionary political pressures of the state and the attempt to dispel dominant ideological prejudices and inequalities inherent within the society. A modern dance chapter within the national

arts is unique in that it was a new performance art built upon the foundation of an international modern expression that was born out of the social revolution of the U.S., the imperialist enemy. All other art forms within the Cuban performance arts after 1959 had existed previous to the revolution in official and unofficial spheres of public performance.

Modern dance, or *danza moderna*, was born as a virgin performance art that grew from the platform of the revolution. This art form strived to communicate the essence and history of the Cuban people as a hybrid nation of races, culture, and identity. The new artistic expression used the concept of the modern hybrid nation and the intersection of cultures as a central theme, inspiration, and guiding philosophy in the structuring of the movement technique. It was also the thematic material used to develop national choreographed works. The importance of *danza moderna* as a pivotal element to the national modern character of the nation has been overlooked by most previous research endeavors. Most have focused upon the introduction of folkloric forms to national culture but failed to examine the performance spheres where the intersection of culture is addressed.

Danza moderna also emphasizes Afro-Cuban history and what is understood as the "folkloric" element of society. It is done within a modernized concept that reinterprets the form and function of history in contemporary contexts and culture rather than reproducing popular authentic forms in performance as folkloric companies did. Cuban modern dance reinterprets old forms of cultural stratification and creates a new platform upon which Afro-Cuban bodies and culture engage in the reconstruction of cultural identity as Cuba presents itself as a modern, Latin American, hybrid nation

Chapter 3:

Contradictions of the Cuban Identity: Cultural Authenticity and the Performance of Blackness

The examination of Cuban arts is a principal component of understanding the foundation upon which the Cuban state re-constituted the vision of a modern nation. The arts of Cuba are diverse and widespread in both rural and urban areas. In contemporary contexts they have served as a main source of international attraction to the island and the Cuban culture. If one mentions or speaks of recent travel to Cuba the reply is often, "Wow, Cuba. I would really love to travel there, especially before Fidel dies and everything changes. Have you ever heard of the Buena Vista Social Club, I just love Cuban music." It is clear from this comment that Cuba has become well known for specific and highly developed cultural arts that have been largely state supported and produced as part of the goal to communicate and celebrate the diverse Cuban identity. The comment also makes it clear that there is a great deal of art and popular culture on the island that is overlooked in international contexts because it has not been marketed as culturally authentic or exotic even though it is still popular expression and evokes social commentary of the Cuban experience. The agenda of the state has molded the way in which certain production models, participants, and physical theatrical forms are fostered and "imagined" by the participants and artists involved in these artistic productions. Within this inquiry it is imperative to take a closer look at the aesthetic principles of these official national forms and examine the state agendas that dictate who is involved, how, and why.

In this final chapter of my thesis I investigate *danza moderna* as it negotiates images of national identity within the context of the state agenda. I examine the technical physical form and institutionalized pedagogical structure of danza *moderna*. This inquiry explores the means by which the Cuban modern dance form is codified and preserved through the instructional programs in the national institutions of dance. I analyze the movement, quality, and form as well as performance of identity in public performance to see how specific artistic decisions play into national agendas of asserting a specific model of a modern national identity. I develop this discussion to examine in detail physical characteristics and bodies that are emphasized and included within specific performance models, which leads to the further examination of the use and appropriation of "blackness" and/or the social significance of the black and hybrid body as instruments of cultivating cultural memory and reinforcing national concepts of culture and identity. The arguments encompassed in the chapter will determine in which ways the approach of the state to celebrate and incorporate Afro-Cuban participation and culture in the national arts further solidifies dangerous and complex ideologies and discourse surrounding identity and race.

SECTION 1: The Physical Form and Institutionalized Structure of *Danza Moderna*

I turn now to look at the specifics of the character and form of *danza moderna,* or as the technique has come to be known, *la técnica cubana*/the cuban technique. As explained previously, it is a dance technique founded in the universal language of modern dance that emphasizes the diasporic qualities and diverse contributions of the Cuban people in an attempt to artistically explore and reflect the notions of Cuban modern

national character and identity as the state proposes it. Although the modern dance of Cuba shares elements of style and form with that of modern dance forms of other African diasporic communities and nations, there is a specific layering of form and energetic quality of the Cuban dancers that sets *danza moderna* apart from the modern dance styles of other nations and communities.

Development and Maintenance of National *Danza Moderna* Form

Before I delve into my discussion of the structure and cultural pedagogy of *danza moderna* it is important to look at the way in which the birth of a national school and the cuban modern dance technique and artistic focus came to fruition after 1959. The first national dance company, *Danza Contemporánea Nacional de Cuba* described in chapter two, preempted the inception of the national schools of arts which house the various professional dance programs that are responsible for the state production of professionally trained dancers and artists. The company, in its early stages, was a collaboration of technical and artistic influences of the international collaborators mentioned in chapter two, who were working with Ramiro Guerra, the principal visionary and teacher of the *danza moderna* project. It was not until Elena Noriega arrived from Mexico that a methodological system was constructed that incorporated the myriad of artistic influences and creative foci from all the teachers form the U.S. and Mexico that had contributed to the experimental Cuban form. Noriega was the driving force in the collaboration of all the influential artists that formed a pedagogical structure in order to implement a curriculum to develop the body, style, and system of conditioning of the aspiring dancers in the company school. These dancers would later become students of

the national school of the future. The following is taken from an interview I conducted with Eduardo Rivero regarding his experience as one of the first principal modern dancers of Cuba and his present position as the director of *Compañía Teatro de la Danza del Caribe*, a national modern dance company in *Santiago de Cuba*. His comments explain the initial stages of *danza moderna* in its early development as a national art form.

> En la primera etapa estaba la gran influencia de Ramiro y Lorna. Elena Noriega vino en esa época a partir de algunos años y fue ella que unificó el sistema, el método, la forma de impartir clases a la compañía porque Ramiro daba algunos trabajos, Lorna daba unas otras cosas, y Elfrida otras, o sea había una disparidad de clases, no había un método ni un sistema, ni una escuela cubana de danza todavía. Entonces, cuando vino la Elena Noriega a Cuba era una maestra muy fuerte con una personalidad muy fuerte y una tradición nacionalista mexicana muy fuerte, entonces ella fue la que unificó en un trabajo que ella hizo en un periodo bastante largo impartiendo clases a todo el mundo. Ella fue la que unificó el trabajo de todos los maestros y hizo un método, un sistema, ella hizo una estructura de clases y es lo que es la técnica cubana de hoy, lo que yo mantengo y no hay otra forma de llarmarle.
>
> In the first stage there was the important influence of Ramiro and Lorna. Elena Noriega came after several years during this time and unified a system, a method, a form by which to teach classes to the company because Ramiro had given his ideas, Lorna gave other ideas, and Elfrida even more, in other words there was a variety of classes and artistic influence. There wasn't a method or a system nor a Cuban school of dance at this time. When Elena Noriega came to Cuba she was a very strong teacher with a strong personality and a nationalist Mexican tradition that was also very strong. It was she that unified the work of the teachers and made a method, a system, she made a structure of classes, which is the Cuban technique of today. It is what I maintain and there is no other form by which to call it (Eduardo Rivero Interview, September 06, 2006).

This citation makes evident that the initial artistic work of the national company and the instruction of dancers was a mixture of social and artistic influences. These later merged

into the specific technical form, manner of instruction, and artistic focus that are the foundation of contemporary dance in present day Cuba.

Today, the Cuban modern dance technique is still maintained in its "pure" codified form throughout the national arts schools from which dancers are selected, molded, and trained to participate in the perpetuation of an institutional legacy that has in turn shaped Cuban artistry, talent, and culture. The scholastic arts program focuses upon the development and production of dancers as conduits of culture and national identity. Inspired by the vision of Ramiro Guerra and several integral international collaborators, special attention is paid to the comprehensive development of the Cuban modern dancers as they are trained how to access and utilize the entirety of their bodies, spirits, personae, and artistic talent in the national schools and later as participants in national dance companies and thus as international cultural agents. They are taught the difference between the performance of ceremonial dance on stage versus that within a spiritual setting. The performance of culture in each setting serves different and specific social purposes, which in turn affects the execution of the movement and character of the dance itself. This distinction is an important one to make and involves a great deal of controversy as to the authenticity and cultural purpose of folklore as it is performed as national culture in national performance spheres. One who performs or embodies the spirit of these dances and culture in theatrical performance needs to have an understanding of the context/settings from which these traditions come and how the performance of the dance for an audience changes the social function and purpose of the dance itself. In this way dancers are principally cultural agents, sculpted and trained by the institutions of the state. *Danza moderna* was approved, and at certain points

disapproved, by the Cuban state. It was a form that contributed to the interdisciplinary effort to indoctrinate specific ideas of national culture as they were extracted from popular Cuban culture. This was part of an effort to communicate the principal social agendas of revolutionary culture and the political agenda of the state. The state focused upon extracting specific aspects of social practice from Cuban culture and history to promote it in national performance spaces as official state culture.

As a result, the official modern dance technique has changed little over the decades in the official institutions in which it is taught. It is maintained as the national model of modern dance from which nearly all other styles and techniques on the island have been spawned, some maintaining the foundation and integrity of the form more than others. The desire and effort by the state to preserve the technique in an unadulterated form is evident in the recent national mandate that states no national company can employ dancers/performers who have not been trained in the national schools where the original modern dance technique is still the basis of all modern dance pedagogy and training. The mandate eradicates the possibility for companies to invite promising athletes and dancers who have "buenas condiciones"/ "a promising condition" and/or have danced outside of national institutions to receive training in company dance classes to eventually become a company member.

The distinction between these two classifications of dancers is understood through identifying terms: *Bailadoras* versus *Bailarinas*. *Bailadoras* are dancers who have received training in informal settings; unofficial schools and/or dance companies, groups, and settings in which Cubans can participate and learn to dance. *Bailarinas* are professionally trained dancers with a *título/* diploma from a national school certifying

them as a professional Cuban dancer. In effect, the mandate streamlines the foundational training and institutional development and discipline of dancers who perform in the official national companies as conduits of national image and culture. National companies rely upon state funding in order to continue the growth of their professionalism and participate as Cuban representatives in the international modern dance performance circuit. Therefore, the state remains in control of what is perceived as dance and who is eligible to become a dancer.

I argue that this mandate was an effort to maintain the authentic "purity", and "culturally correct" form of Cuban modern dance/*danza moderna* as it was known from its inception. The mandate is a way for the Cuban state to maintain control over national artistic development and production and thus, the national image in international spectrums. Dance companies perform to Cuban and international tourist audiences within Cuba and beyond national borders as part of the increasing global popularity surrounding Cuban performing arts. If all professional dancers of the nation are trained with the same foundation they will learn the national "code" of modern dance as it has been codified. The result will be that each will have been schooled and sculpted with the desired technical and performance quality in that they will have developed their bodies and sense of artistry in the "Cuban way". Thus, these dancers will be fit to represent the Cuban nation and it's people as trained cultural agents.

It is in this spectrum of the development and function of modern dance in Cuban society that differs from the international modern dance arena that surrounds it. Modern dance, a genre of artistic inquiry, has grown through many different stages. In the United States performing arts communities have passed through the modern dance era, the post-

modern dance era, and now exist in the realm of contemporary dance, consistently broadening the spectrum of what is considered dance, theater, and performance and how it reflects social trends in national communities. The mandate surrounding the education of aspiring Cuban professional dancers illustrates the state's control over the arts. This control is maintained to resist the transformation of form and quality in national performance. It also preserves the form and social function of the dance as well as the social commentary it produces. In this way, the communication of national identity through the arts meets state requirements and remains within the confines of national rhetoric surrounding national culture.

Dance Education:

The structure of the contemporary education of Cuban dancers is unique in that it includes an emphasis upon the comprehensive development of the dancer/artist. This includes classical ballet technique and Cuban modern dance technique (as it was formed by Guerra, Noriega and others) as well as the technical forms of theatrical folkloric dance and the popular dances of Cuban popular culture. Unlike the majority of U.S. based professional dance programs, dancers and graduates of La E.N.A *(La Escuela Nacional de Arte*) and La E.V.A (*La Escuela Vocacional de Arte*), the two national dance schools in Cuba in *La Habana* and *Santiago de Cuba* respectively, are trained in a cross-disciplinary manner. They take classes in dance technique as well as choreography/composition, acting, music and artistry to develop and sharpen their artistic presence, creative skills, musicality and the ability to collaborate with one another artistically. This broad base of instruction in technique, performance, and academics

assures the development of their bodies, artistic competence, and intellect so that they become keen representatives of the national image and perform artistic reflections of Cuban cultural history as it is imagined and produced by state mandates.[i]

My inquiry into the comprehensive training of Cuban dancers led me to an interview with Jorge Luis Roblejo, one of the dance professors who works not only with the national company *Danza Contemporánea de Cuba*, but also with pre-professional dancers and artists at La E.N.A. He explained that he trains his students to execute movement technique and know the folklore portrayed in the folkloric dances and the social messages they communicate. As a part of this curriculum he requires his students to attend *tambors*/ceremonies of Afro-Cuban religious practices in order to understand the social context and the cultural roots of the dance and drum rhythms that are integral in contemporary national performances (Jorge Luis Roblejo Interview, December 27, 2006). It is this type of ethnographic approach and holistic training that informs the work and training of Cuban dancers and performances as well as it evokes culturally relevant, electrifying performances. The arts and artists of Cuba are developed to be of an authentic and spirited nature so that they are able to communicate the vibrant essence of Cuban cultural practices as they are interpreted in theatrical performances and portrayed for public audiences. Later in the chapter I will examine that this is not without severe social implications as the representations of culture operate in isolation on stage away from their original social context and the communities that have lived, preserved, and transformed these practices. It is through this aspect of national cultural production that many of the Afro-Cuban ceremonial practices have been extracted and severed from their original social contexts. Requiring students to contextualize and identify the cultural

origins of the gestures, movements, and the characterizations they learn in dance technique classes enhances the development of the dancers not just as artistic performers, but also as cultural agents in national and international performance spheres.

The professional work and scholastic requirements of teachers like Roblejo emphasize the comprehensive approach to the training and instruction of dancers in Cuba. An emphasis is placed upon the social and cultural context to the dance techniques that have become part of a nationally identified form and discipline. The results of such comprehensive training in *danza moderna* was originally codified by Ramiro Guerra and Elena Noriega who drew inspiration from the work of Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, and other major figures in the U.S. based model. This was evident as I participated in company classes of *Compañía Teatro de la Danza del Caribe* in *Santiago de Cuba*, *Compañía de la danza Narcisco Medina* in *La Habana*, as well as the summer dance workshop "*CubaDanza*". The workshop is an annual summer program of the Teatro *Nacional* taught by company professors of *Danza Contemporánea de Cuba*, many who had been dancers in the initial national company *Danza Conteporánea Nacional de Cuba*. The brochure describing the program states the following about *danza moderna* or, as it has become known in more recent years as *danza contemporánea*.

> Danza Contemporánea de Cuba, fundada en 1959 ha desarollado un estilo particular, síntesis de la danza moderna universal y el folklore cubano, pudiéndose afirmar que ha creado una visión novedosa de la danza y la técnica contemporánea nacional
>
> Contemporary Dance of Cuba, founded in 1959, has developed a particular style, a synthesis of universal modern dance and Cuban folklore, so that it can be said that it has created a novel vision of contemporary national dance and technique (Cubarte brochure summer 2005, Teatro Nacional)

This synthesis of universal style of modern dance and the state supported model of the diverse Cuban culture produces a signature quality of a hybrid Cuban form that speaks of the hybrid history, culture, and people of the nation. The appropriation of popular cultural practices is used to communicate the vision of national culture and expression. Culture is extracted from its original social context and infused with the official form of *danza moderna* to produce a culturally relevant expression of the Cuban human condition. The emphasis of the hybrid form within the creation of the modern dance technique was part of a selective process that asserts specific cultural identities and memories of the Cuban people to portray the nation. I argue that this approach is problematic in that the cultural inspiration for the national form becomes separated from the culture itself as it is appropriated to devise a performed representation of culture.

The roots of Cuban modern dance training were codified in the code of conditioning exercises in what is referred to as the second stage of artistic development in *danza moderna*. The first of stage of development was the artistic and social experimentation by Guerra and the international collaborators to capture the essence and quality of Cuban life and cultural experience as it is communicated through movement. The code and technical emphasis of movement that was emphasized in the second stage of development of the art form has been passed down through the ranks of principal dancers and choreographers who were the original protéges of Ramiro Guerra, Elena Noreiga, and the national company. Guerra and Noriega hand selected dancers to teach the national technique in the physical form and pedagogy in which it had been created in order to maintain the integrity of the national art form as it had been envisioned in light of specific cultural facets of the diverse Cuban nation. One of the dancers selected to

teach students of the company school was Eduardo Rivero, the current company director of *Danza Caribe* of *Santiago de Cuba* (cited in chapter two and previously in this chapter). When Rivero began teaching technique classes of Cuban *danza moderna* he could not deviate from the codified technique in any way; his teaching style and form had to be the indoctrinated and official form structured by Guerra and Noriega. This is demonstrated in the following comment made by Rivero during an interview.

> A partir de los primeros años Elena hizo un trabajo para ayudar Ramiro de hacer una estructura de clases, una serie de ejercicios para especificar qué debería hacer primero. Para cada parte del cuerpo hay que hacer un estilización. Ramiro escribió la serie de ejercios con Elena. Entonces, eso yo tuve que hacerlo y estudiarlo mucho para después poderlo impartir en una escuela anexa a la compañía en un estudio del teatro nacional de Cuba para impartir clases después del trabajo a gente de la calle porque todavía no había una escuela de arte. Con las bailarinas de las clases formaban otras bailarinas de la compañía. Yo trabajaba con los alumnos nuevos con esa estructura y esos fueron los ejercicios dictado por Elena y Ramiro. Yo no podía hacer otros ejercicios, tenía que hacer estos mismos ejercicios y de allí es donde yo sigo con las clases de la escuela cubana de la danza moderna.
>
> After the first several years, Elena worked to help Ramiro make a structure of classes, a series of exercises to specify what should come first; for each part of the body there needs to be a specific styling. Ramiro wrote the series of exercises with Elena. Then, I had to do it and study it a great deal to be able to teach in the annex school of the company in a studio that was in the national theatre of Cuba, to teach classes after work to people from the street because there still was no school of the arts. Dancers from these classes became new dancers of the company. I worked with new students with this structure and taught them the exercises as they were dictated by Elena and Ramiro. I couldn't teach other exercises I had to do their same exercises, which is what I continue to teach, the classes of the Cuban school of modern dance (Eduardo Rivero Interview, September 6, 2006).

It was not until Rivero began doing work in choreography that he was able to explore and assert his own creative style, artistic voice, and interpretations of cultural material. As his comment demonstrates, in his work with *Danza Caribe* he continues to preserve the

original essence and technical form of *danza moderna* as his teachers created it. Today he is well known in the national Cuban arts circuit for preserving the authenticity and technical artistic quality of the original national form.

Physical form and energetic quality of Cuban *danza moderna*

I turn now to unpack the physical components and energetic emphases of the Cuban technique and movement quality to make a distinction of how it differs from and compares to other technical forms and social expressions of dance in the international circuit. Many modern dance techniques focus upon exploring new ways in which the use of one's center informs and supports how other parts of the body move either in unison or in isolation from one another and how the execution of movement within syncopated time or rhythm is employed to change the effect of the movement. The negotiation around the body's center of gravity becomes a point of reference to return to as the body moves through space. As a result, dance technique and choreographies have become more diverse as the use of the body's extremities in negotiation with the physical center becomes more experimental. While ballet and modern dance may differ in energetic quality of dance technique and choreography, the use of the center of the body as the impetus and foundation of movement is necessary for the execution of all dance and movement techniques. Without a center there can be nothing to move around or from. The knowledge and fine tuned perception of how to access and utilize the strength of the body's center is integral to functional movement itself. For this reason, the methodology used to develop the body and the formation of class exercises in the modern tradition is heavily influenced by classical ballet technique. Similar formats are used to warm up,

work, and develop strength in the body. In modern dance such exercises are explored in a variety of ways that differ from ballet to achieve a variety of energetic qualities, physical expressions, and gestures that embody social and cultural significance. Many of the movement principles in ballet are employed in modern dance. They are taken "off center", as modern movement modalities play with the use of body weight and its negotiation around the body's center of gravity for increased creativity and expressive quality of movement.

The off center use of the hips, contractions of the torso, undulations of the spine, turns in contraction, and the energetic, circular movements with the head, shoulders, and chest are all part of the unique character of the Cuban technique/*la técnica Cubana*. The complexities of the technique are executed while maintaining the integrity of strong and long balletic lines and detail to emphasize a clean, precise, and strong aesthetic. These qualities represent defining characteristics of what has become a distinct Cuban modern dance form and effectively set *danza moderna* apart from classic balletic forms in which these parts of the body remain fixed, erect and with little flexion or expression. Suki John, a dancer, choreographer and writer who returned to Cuba for a two week stay after having spent a year there during her childhood, studied with professors and choreographers of *danza moderna* and describes the Cuban technique in the following.

> The *técnica cubana* combined the strength of the Cuban ballet tradition, elements of the Graham and Cunningham techniques, and the sensuous fluidity and rhythmic complexity of Afro-Cuban folklore. I was amazed by the absolute physical mastery enjoyed by dancers trained in the *técnica cubana*. A typical combination would involve multiple turns (with and without contractions), dives to the floor, leaps to the rafters, and syncopated isolations of the ribs, hips and head. Flexed, sickled feet, raised hips, twisting torsos, and rolling heads identified the *técnica cubana*

> as distinct, even as it incorporated the extended lines and salient turns of classical ballet and traditional modern (John 2002, p. 74).

It is clear from John's observations that the execution of the *técnica cubana* and the performed choreographies that were born from its inspiration require incredible strength and technical control of the body as well as intense discipline to work and study the body to achieve such physical feats. The Cuban dance technique recruits the use of the entire body and stretches the full spectrum of the body's natural potential requiring tremendous discipline and dedication as a dancer and an artist. The scholastic culture and the form of instruction in the national schools are known for a strict and vigorous code of instruction. Cuban dancers are accustomed to their instructors physically adjusting their bodies to achieve higher leg extensions, clearer lines of the body, a more open pelvis, more ample turnout, or higher jumps as they execute technical moves and positions in class. The culture of instruction is one in which teachers are very firm with their students. They require them to repeat exercises multiple times until they are performed perfectly, pushing the students to access the energy and stamina in their psyches and bodies, building physical strength and character.

La técnica cubana draws heavily upon the work and philosophy of Martha Graham's modern dance technique as well as other integral influences of the work by Limón, Humphrey, and artists mentioned in chapter two. The physical work and technical philosophy of the Graham technique posits the pelvis as a central component to movement and human expression. Graham's technical movement theory and practical system for the development of the body as a coordinated tool for artistic, social, and natural expression focuses intensely on a system of contraction and release of the torso

that stems from and reverberates out from the pelvis. These movement principles incorporate the coordination of the breath in combination with physical movement. As the dancer contracts his/her torso he/she exhales and as he/she releases and expands he/she inhales, driving the movement with the breath. This principle of expansion and contraction facilitates the execution of the cyclical and spiraling patterns of movement integral in the work of *danza moderna*. It is the contraction and release of the center of the body in combination with elements of suspension and grounded movement that allows for the play between momentum and control that moves the body through space. The influence of Martha Graham as well as several other U.S.-based artists is made clear in the following comment by Rivero in which he explains the process by which these techniques were incorporated into the Cuban inspiration and form that was evolving in Cuba.

> Ramiro daba unos tipos de clases, daba clases con los tambores batá y eso fue la primera etapa de la influencia cubana donde hacía mucho trabajo con el torso de contracciones, arqueos, y una serie de cosas en particular las piernas y los pies fuertes de crear una serie de gestos que yo encontraba muy cubano y aunque la material de Graham era una gran inventiva y una gran cadencia y puede ser la padre de la danza moderna cubana. Entonces, en las clases de Elena está incluido la técnica de Martha Graham. Esa segunda etapa de ponerlo en una estructura de Graham de los ejercicos del suelo, de Doris Humphrey con las caídas y recuperación, estaba de los movimentoes ligeros de José Limón y del trabajo de Ramiro, el trabajo del torso. La recuperación del torso es una forma muy Cubana.
>
> Ramiro gave a certain type of class, he gave classes with bata drums and this was the first stage of the Cuban influence where he did a lot of work with contractions of the torso, curves of the body, and a series of strong particular movements with the legs and the feet to create a series of gestures that I found to be very Cuban, although the material of Graham was a great creative and rhythmical influence and could be considered the father of the Cuban modern dance. So, in Elena's classes the technique of Martha Graham is included. This second stage of putting it all together in the structure of Graham's floor exercisers, the fall and recovery of Doris

> Humphrey's movements and the free fluid movements of Jose Limón, with Ramiro's work of the of torso, the recovery of the torso is a form that is very Cuban. (Eduardo Rivero Interview, September 06, 2006).

As mentioned here by Rivero, the floor exercises integral in the Cuban technique are based heavily in Graham and Limón movement principles. These exercises condition the body to move with a specific energy and function that is inspired by the interpretation of the organic impetus of the human condition and the natural world. The unique uses of the head in a spiraling pattern, the isolation of the shoulders, and the rippling undulations of the torso are signature qualities of the Cuban form. These forms are founded in and based upon folkloric movement as it was interpreted by Guerra and those who experimented and collaborated with him in the beginning stages of artistic exploration. Guerra wanted to bring together dance discipline with movement he imagined to be culturally and historically significant in Cuban society, history, and within the cultural memory of the Cuban people.

The focus of the Cuban technique, like the work of Graham, centers the development of vibrant and fluid forms that originate and undulate from the pelvis. The pelvis, the physical center of the body, is a body part that has deep-seated physical, spiritual, and cultural significance. Mechanically it is the central point and core of all movement where the spine connects the upper body to the lower body and where these two physical elements negotiate working together to coordinate body function and fluid movement. Spiritually, the body's center (or pelvis) represents the center of life force energy as well as male and female sexuality and human reproduction. Socially, the pelvis and the buttocks are contested body parts that are attached to many weighted racial and

gender specific stereotypes and cultural values. For these reasons, their cultural significance is strong and important in the dances and social expressions of certain cultures and communities in which the emphasis of pelvic movement holds social meaning and is celebrated and/or revered. As Brenda Dixon Gottschild commented in her work *The Black Dancing Body,* the social meaning connected to the buttocks and hips represents opposing socio-cultural values founded in the colonial paradigm. "In this savage-versus-cultivated dialectic the buttocks symbolize the historical dichotomy between Africanist and Europeanist Aestethic principles" (Gottschild 2003, p. 147). Her comment affirms that body types and physical characteristics are characterized and reserved for culturally specific performances.

The evolution of contemporary technical practices that I experienced and observed while in Cuba varied from company to company but all were clearly based on similar principles of the original set of codified exercises that are still taught in the national school to this day. My familiarity with the technique comes not only from time spent in Cuba researching national dance companies, but also from the direction of professional Cuban dancers who reside in the United States and teach the *técnica cubana* at U.S. dance studios. In the effort to organize and align the body and its physical strength in relationship to the body's center/pelvis the classes I observed and participated in began in a similar format to a contemporary ballet class. Initial class exercises and stretches are either at a ballet *barre* or standing in the center of the room to warm up, stretch, and establish the clear intention of the lines of the body for optimum strength, clarity of movement, balance, and control. These exercises always began with coordinating the breath with small contractions and expansions of the torso with the feet

in parallel, as if to inflate and deflate the body in a wavelike energy centering the body. Generally classes progress with the execution of a series of fluid exercises that are based on the afore-mentioned movement principles of contraction, release, and spiral patterning that embody an energetic play of suspended and grounded movement. The energy of the movements performed in these technique classes is fluid. One movement pattern flows into the next so that there is never a fixed position. The movements undulate and pulsate like a jellyfish, expanding and contracting to move the body through space. With each extension of the limbs and torso the dancer aspires to reach further and maintain this space and length as he/she curves into contraction where the pelvis acts as the anchor of the fluid movement. The symbiotic relationship and fluctuation of extension and contraction creates a contrast in the movement that facilitates the energy to spiral outward from the body's center through the limbs while maintaining strength and control at the core.

As classes proceed the rhythm of the dancer's breath gets deeper and movements become bigger and more complicated requiring a dynamic but firm connection to the body's center so the dancer maintains control of the movement. Contractions with spirals unfold into arched expansion while propelling and whirling the body through space. The exercises at the center are done in preparation to move across the floor in which the same movement principles are employed as the dancers move with incredible strength, flexibility and agility. The influences and movement modalities of Graham, Humphrey, and Limón are clearly stated in the initial warm up exercises and larger movement

principles in the Cuban technique classes. It is made clear in this forum that international influence inspired the pioneers of *danza moderna* to search for a modern dance expression and pedagogy that is unique to the Cuban culture and experience.

The complexity of the Cuban technique compiles a myriad of cultural, philosophical, and technical influences. Cultural influences extend beyond the physicality and technicality of the dance to the environment in which it is learned, practiced, and performed. Classes, performances, and rehearsals are conducted to live percussive musical accompaniment, a practice that began with the classes of Ramiro Guerra. He recognized and incorporated the important relationship between dance and the playing of drums in Afro-Cuban ritual and tradition in which these two activities together are a means to spiritual and community communication. Contemporary national companies continue to employ both musicians and dancers as a part of a complete dance company ensemble. Both are of equal importance to the production of company performances. Rehearsal time not only focuses upon perfecting the execution of choreography, it also is spent perfecting the musicality and coordination of the choreography with percussive accompaniment. Dancers are taught to learn choreography not only in standard counts but also to pay attention to rhythmic pattern and song to feel the musicality of the dance and the inherent relationship between the drum and the movement. In this arena the music is as much a part of the performance as is the dance. This was evident during one of the rehearsals with the Santiago based company *Danza Caribe.* As the company rehearsed "Sulkuri", one of the initial works of Eduardo Rivero and a cornerstone choreography of the company, it had to be repeated a plethora of times

to coordinate the many musicians and singers first with one another and then with the dancers.

One drum that is used in particular is the Batá, an important drum in the Yoruban based traditions and culture. It is the musical element that facilitates the connection between the living and spiritual world in specific Afro-Cuban religions. Other drums commonly used are the Conga and the Cajón, instruments that have significance in popular music and activities of rumba, a style of music, dance, and social culture central to popular Afro-Cuban culture. The use of specific drums and corresponding rhythms is significant in that they embody a spiritual and popular aspect of the Afro-Cuban based traditions in contemporary Cuban culture. The practice ties the modern dance form in Cuba to the traditional function of dance in African and African diasporic cultures in which dance and drum rhythms facilitate the communication of spirituality and identity. The Cuban modern dance technique is one that aspires to embody the power and spirit of secular ceremonial dances. A grounded movement quality works in opposition with the energetic and powerful jumps that demonstrate the "folkloric" quality and energy in the dance culture. The Afro-Cuban roots of the dance give a strength and sensuality to the form whereas the more classical Spanish influence elaborates the suspension, fluidity and centered quality of the movement. *Danza moderna* applies technical principles to the array of movement qualities to produce a bold aesthetic that speaks to the diverse roots of Cuban culture.

In the next section I explore the problematic concepts of culture and identity with specific attention paid to historically marginalized peoples and cultures as they are portrayed through *danza moderna*. The incorporation of instruments like the Batá in

national performance culture is not without complications in ideology and practice. As instruments, ceremonial songs, and dances of Afro-Cuban traditions are incorporated in national performance spheres a severing of such cultural elements and traditions from their historical purpose and cultural roots occurs. The effort by the Cuban state to incorporate the culture of the greater Cuban populace in national culture alters the ideologies and social function from which these practices originate. As a result, the practices become institutionalized and cease to be "of" the people. Therefore, as *danza moderna* aspired to reflect and interpret popular Cuban culture in national performance production the presentation of the cultural elements featured became less and less a reflection of the people and more a reflection of national rhetoric and national culture as it was dictated by state institutions.

The state's approach to address separatist ideologies and discourses in Cuban history by celebrating and incorporating Afro-Cuban participation and culture in the national cultural arts exacerbated and proliferated the dangerous and complex ideologies and discourses that remain in society. I emphasize here that identity is not a static category; it is a dynamic entity, the expression of identity cannot be codified and locked in time. The Cuban state possesses a strong hold upon what has been described by some contemporary Cuban artists as an existential expression of culture. The institutionalization of the technical form of *danza moderna* as well as the institutionally based development of dancers and the modern dance discipline needs to be further examined. This includes how the arts perpetuate the production of stereotypes and a fixed image of Cuban identity in the national reconstruction project.

SECTION 2: The Black Body: The Appropriation of Black Identity and Cultural Image in National Performance Arts, *Danza Moderna* specifically

Cultural appropriation within the arts leads me to my next point of inquiry in which I explore the complex and layered socio-political agency of dark skinned dancers in Cuban national performance. I focus specifically on modern dance. The bodies of dancers are the tools through which the expression of national constructions of culture and identity are performed. It was not until the revolution that black bodies and performances of "blackness" were included within the official national cultural arts. The following discussion of "blackness" in national performances of identity expands the idea that posits these dancers as technicians of space in which they re-negotiate cultural norms and signifiers (see chapter two). I discuss how racial stereotypes and ideologies surrounding blackness are perpetuated and re-enforced in (1) the institutionalized structures of national performance and, (2) through the codification of technique and form. The result is a specific model appropriated from cultural practices to codify the historical significance of the black body in Cuban history and culture. It is true that the revolution increased opportunities for marginalized sectors of society, mostly dark skinned Cubans, but it is important to look at the way the state has appropriated black forms and bodies to structure specific national ideologies of modern Cuba.

The Modern Cuban nation

The Cuban state's development of national modern and folkloric dance performance models in the reconstruction of the national cultural arts sought to dignify Afro-Cuban history and cultural contributions within greater Cuban society. The

incorporation of Afro-Cuban music and physical expression that had been purposely omitted from national culture was part of the state's attempt to assert a new ideology and discourse surrounding the contemporary Cuban diasporic identity. The arts, at the time of the revolution, were used to *fortalecer*/strengthen the image and consciousness of the *pueblo/*Cuban people. The Cuban civic body, after the triumph of the revolution, became predominantly Afro-Cuban since many of the upper-class white population fled the country. Therefore an investigation of the national arts cannot be made without examining and unpacking the important role and politicization of the black body and Afro-centric cultures within the identity of the modern day Cuban nation. To quote Fidel Castro directly we can see the reasoning for the inclusion and increased representation of the black body and culture in the reconstruction of the official national culture in the image of the Cuban people. The black body stands as a symbol for the suffering and oppression experienced by the marginalized Afro-Cuban peoples in Cuba and throughout the Americas.

> Si a los revolucionarios nos preguntan qué es lo que más nos importa, nosotros diremos: el pueblo y siempre diremos el pueblo. El pueblo en su sentido real, es decir, esa mayoría del pueblo que ha tenido que vivir en la explotación y en el olvido más cruel. Nuestra preocupación fundamental siempre serán las grandes mayorías del pueblo, es decir, las clases oprimidas y explotadas del pueblo.
>
> If they ask us, the revolutionaries, what is it that is most important to us, we will say: the people and we will always say the people. The people in the true sense, that is, the majority of the people that have had to live in exploitation and who have been cruely neglected. Our fundamental concern will always be the masses, that is to say, the exploited and oppressed classes of society (Castro 1961, p. 8).

A great deal of the investigation of modern national identity is a search through the historical and cultural past to uncover traditions, roots of culture, and perspectives of history. These traditions were prohibited, altered, and omitted during colonial rule but had a profound effect on the formation of perspectives of modern nationalism. This reflection of the past to enlighten a collective outlook upon the future was useful to post-colonial nations in redefining "the national" as a civic construct that geographically, politically, and culturally binds a people together. National identity had much to do with the way in which the state could and did construct a national image in light of the history and cultural contributions of the people themselves. In the Americas this means defining the nation in terms of the many diasporic and indigenous identities and cultural contributions that were integral in the history of colonialism. This idea of the modern nation as a construct is labeled by Anthony Smith, author of *The Antiquity of Nations*, as "The Myth of the "Modern Nation". The following comment by Smith explains this idea further.

> The basic idea of this recent myth is simple. The nation, it holds, is neither natural nor immemorial, much less self-generative. On the contrary, it is a relatively modern phenomenon arising out of specific modern conditions and ideally suited to those conditions. It is also a construct. Human beings, specifically nationalists, invent nations, though they may not do so wholly of their own volition……It is important here to recall that myths mingle factual observations and generalizations with dramatic narrative interpretations, and that they relate past events to present and/or future purposes (Smith 2004, pp. 35/39).

The renewal of diverse historical perspectives in creating the illusion of a collective identity repositions marginalized traditions and cultural identities as important components of national culture. In the transformation toward the modern national construct, diasporic populations and cultural practices that have existed outside of

political and social discourses are removed from the periphery and assimilated into the status quo. This shift in political and social importance of culture in the reconstruction of nationalist perspectives recognizes the cultural contributions of slave populations as important to society but fails to recognize how institutionalized slavery and the supporting social systems were influential in the formation of these diasporic histories, cultures, and identities as well as the social ideologies that surrounded them. It is not enough to politically de-legitimize slavery and the social systems that coincide with it, the social ideologies that are a result of these hierarchical and unjust social, economic, and cultural practices need to be investigated and deconstructed. Paul Gilroy examines this phenomenon with respect to the history of slavery in his cornerstone text of African diasporic studies, *The Black Atlantic*. This text is necessary for any inquiry into the culture and politicization of African diasporic populations and identities within modern day society. He states the following,

> It is interesting that in this understanding of blacks in the modern, western world, the door to tradition remains wedged open not by the memory of modern racial slavery but in spite of it. Slavery is the site of black victimage and thus of tradition's intended erasure. When the emphasis shifts towards the elements of invariant tradition that heroically survive slavery, any desire to remember slavery itself becomes something of an obstacle. It seems as if the complexity of slavery and its location within modernity has to be actively forgotten if a clear orientation to tradition and thus to the present circumstances of blacks is to be aquired (Gilroy 1993, p.189).

For this reason, my investigation of the development of the Cuban modern dance form, artistic culture, and its social discourse is embedded within a larger inquiry. This includes understanding the political motivation and shortcomings of how revolutionary Cuba utilized, promoted, and designated space for Afro-Cuban bodies and culture as well

as the Cuban state's effort to understand racist practices and social structures in a way that fell short of uprooting the problem. Racist discourse and ideology within the revolutionary Cuban nation was never addressed. The Cuban state only addressed the issues of social access and equality that are based upon racist ideologies; negative racial attitudes were not deconstructed and contested. Therefore social practices and perspectives that have a foundation in slavery remain in spite of claims that racism and racist conduct were eradicated from society, a topic I discuss in greater detail.

The use and agency of the black body and Afro-Cuban cultural themes as they are combined with aspects of European culture aim to promote a hybrid identity as a central component of the revolutionary Cuban national identity. In theory, this national image celebrates the diverse Cuban citizenry as a unified and collective public despite racial, cultural, and historical differences that had defined systems of social hierarchy in the past. The goal of the hybrid art form was to honor the multicultural roots of Cuban culture and rebuke historically racist practices and protocols. The promotion and preservation of specific and diverse cultural legacies that are part of the national history is integral to this goal. Peter Wade comments on the paradox inherent in the establishment of a codified hybrid form such as *danza moderna* and the evolution of identity within modernizing nations in which concepts of blackness are reminiscent of both colonial and modern sentiments alike. He states the following:

> If analyses of race, class and politics have highlighted the close connection of blackness with poverty and low status, then the more global and historical analysis of cultural change and cultural construction teaches us that an interesting contradiction is submerged in Latin American (and indeed Western) societies. ……This paradoxical co-existence of images of black culture as both traditional and primitive, and modern and progressive is part of the explanation for why, in countries such as Brazil,

> Cuba, Colombia and Argentina, musical styles associated with black people and the lower classes - samba, son, cumbia, tango - became mainstreamed into national musical icons. These musical styles successfully mediated between the traditional and the modern in ways that suited nationalist sentiments very well (Wade 2004, pp. 117-118).

Wade makes clear that the use and assimilation of the image and concept of blackness is key in the construction of a comprehensive and modern Cuban national identity. It was the aim of the state to reconfigure the identity on the nation as a contradiction of the past. Therefore, an emphasis of the inclusion of black Cubans and "black culture" into national identities and institutions was paramount. The celebration of and attention to the practices and culture of a people that had been enslaved and oppressed previous to the revolution sets a clear delineation between a racist past and a theoretically progressive future. Therefore, the introduction of a modern dance form is an integral step in the modernizing project due to the fact that it invokes social reflection on the part of the participants and spectators alike to imagine a hybrid nation. The official national culture aims to centralize an artistic focus that promotes the popular cultural practices as the reflection of national culture.

The Black Dancer as Political Icon in Cuban Performing Arts

I examine in greater detail the role and importance of the black dancer in the official cultural arts of Cuba, specifically in the development of *danza moderna*. In doing so, it is necessary to expand the line of inquiry from chapter one that investigates the "folklorization" of Afro-Cuban cultural practices, a social process that results in the codification and theatricalization of performed Afro-Cuban culture. After 1959,

performance spaces were an important component of the reconfiguration of the arts and the promotion of the revolutionary ideology of equality among all Cubans. As the revolution attempted to eliminate social stratifications, the visibility of black professionals, students, and integrated public spaces was symbolic. At this moment the introduction of Cuban modern dance, *danza moderna*, plays an important role as a new national art form that was born with the Cuban revolution. It features the reflection of society and culture in the image of the hybrid modern nation, rebuking colonial and imperialist perspectives. The premise and defining principle of the artistic form was a new dance vocabulary and artistic inspiration that reflects the "essence" of the Cuban people and culture. The appropriation of Afro-Cuban informed gesture and expression, as well as the incorporation of black bodies and Afro-Cuban history were central elements to the comprehensive production of the art form.

It is here that the pivotal paradox of the nation state is made evident. As the modern hybrid identity and Afro-Cuban culture were celebrated through national arts and literature, the state simultaneously enforced social laws that prohibited civic-based investigation and inquiry into the roots of the diverse identities present within the nation. All Cubans existed under the revolution and their principal identity was "Cuban". Each citizen was to identify with a sense of nationalism and civic pride, not an individual affiliation of racial or cultural identity.

This rhetoric and political ideology, in effect, negated the celebration and investigation of the diversity of the nation outside of that of the collective hybrid identity. It inhibited Cubans from seeking the means to investigate and understand people, cultural legacies, and histories that constitute the reality of Cuban identity. We see this

shortcoming of the state within *danza moderna* and national folklore performances in which black bodies are emphasized as technicians of space, a concept that was introduced and explained in chapter two. Literally, they are bodies that are used to re-define cultural norms and expectations of what is communicated and understood as "being" Cuban on a national and international level. The employment and active recruitment of these bodies by the state for the new national cultural forms creates a complex dynamic in which the bodies are celebrated but, at the same time, reaffirm racial categories and identities that are a product of colonial and post-colonial ideologies.

African bodies and the cultures that traveled with them across the Atlantic by way of the middle passage are central to the historical economies and social practices of American nations. The black body was/is the instrument that physically built the Cuban nation during the colonial period when black Cubans of African lineage were bound by slavery and were thus the primary human labor source. It is also the human vessel that houses the medium through which the spiritual world is summoned to the physical world in specific Afro-Cuban ceremonial practices. Rhythm created on consecrated drums in various Afro-Cuban practices calls upon deities that enter the physical world through the medium of the human body in the form of dance and movement. Due to the spiritual nature and purpose of both drums and dance, these practices were central to the preservation of Afro-Cuban culture and identity and the construction of a diasporic identity for African populations in the New World. Such activities also provided an escape from social, political, and economic oppression throughout the colonial and post-colonial Cuban history. Rex Nettleford, the artistic director and founder of the *National Dance Theater Company of Jamaica*, established shortly after Jamaica's independence

from England, explains the importance of the African diasporic body and the dance tradition in the formation of independent and contemporary Caribbean national identity and autonomy.

> For the African slave discovered soon enough that his/her control over that prime instrument of expression, the body that encased the intellect and the imagination, placed such expressions beyond the reach of the oppressor, who in any case, needed that very instrument for the energy so vital for high productivity in the cultivation of sugar. Dance, through recreation, ritual worship, and nonverbal communication of the inner stirrings of the soul, became a survival tool that spoke to conquest over dispersal and denigration (Nettleford 2002, p. 81).

As noted here dance is an expression of life for African diasporic populations as well as a means to the preservation of identity and culture.

The body is central to dance as well as to the history and ideology of slavery. While the bodies of slaves were used, abused and regarded as elements of property that were owned by Creole plantation owners within the dominant social structures, they were/are also principal components of preserving the cultural memory of the past as ethnic lineages and diasporic traditions evolved in the New World. Dancing was a way for slaves to stay connected to the culture, heritage, and ancestors of their African nations; aspects of their identity that were denied to them by the colonial oppressive paradigm. Therefore, dance became central to the efforts of the Cuban revolutionary state to construct the nation in the image and practices of the Cuban people. But, as I have explained previously as the Afro-Cuban influence of these popular practices entered the realm of the national, they became subject to institutional codification to fit the approved national form and revolutionary agenda.

When I asked why black bodies were not present in the Cuban ballet or conversely, why white bodies were not included in national folkloric companies the response time and again was confusion as to why I would I ask such a question. These separate and specific performance spaces had specific ideological images attached to them that upheld social norms, ideologies and popular identifications. One dancer went so far as to comment that a black dancer in the ballet appears odd, like a fly in a glass of milk (interview with dancer, August 18, 2005). Folkloric dance is a dance of the folk and therefore a portrayal of black Afro-Cuban culture, ballet is a classical form with its origins as a form of entertainment in the regal court of Europe, therefore a portrayal of white European culture. To challenge this understanding and portrayal of Cuban cultural roots and cultural norms challenges the status quo. In this respect it is important to examine how the body relates to specific cultural values, social standards, and ideologies that play into the construction of identity. Identity is inherently linked to physical appearance and personal expression. The examination of cultural practices, speech, movement, dress etc. clarifies this idea in that each category elicits specific representations and preconceived notions about an individual and/or cultural group. In this sense, identity is in and of itself performed through the physicality and appearance of the body. This concept emerged in multiple interviews with dancers, professors, and company directors. Therefore, to question who was an eligible participant in specific national performance spheres questions the cultural form itself and the institutionalized concepts of popular and national identity. The arts are regarded as authentic forms of cultural expression; a reproduction of the cultural practices of the people, therefore such

experimentation that challenges the social agency of bodies included in national performance and the social discourses attached to them was/is not encouraged.

The goal of producing authentic representations of culture interacts with institutionalized concepts of authenticity. Discussions of racial casting, dancer participation, and who is considered culturally and racially authentic for each professional performance role locks popular perspectives of identity into static categories. In fact, identity is a dynamic concept defined in terms relative to the social narratives that bind it. The complications that arise congruently with a preoccupation of authenticity are explored in the introduction of the book *Appropriating Blackness* written by Patrick Johnson. It is a text that explores the social and institutional meaning of "blackness" and the performative elements of racial identification. An excerpt of importance is displayed in the following.

> The key here is to be cognizant of the arbitrariness of authenticity, the ways in which it carries with it the dangers of foreclosing the possibilities of cultural exchange and understanding…..When black Americans have employed the rhetoric of black authenticity, the outcome has often been a political agenda that has excluded more voices than it has included. The multiple ways in which we construct blackness within and outside black American culture is contingent on the historical moment in which we live and our evershifting subject positions. For example, black Americans, whose vocality, leadership, and rhetoric flourished at the historical moment in which they lived, contested popular constructions of blackness in order to further their own political agendas and occasionally to stake out a space from which to argue for the inclusion of other signs of "blackness" (Johnson 2003, p. 3).

This statement makes evident that concepts and definitions of "blackness" fixated on maintaining and reproducing an authentic form re-inforce previously delineated structures and discourses of power that are founded of principles of exclusion and oppression. Ironically, these structures of power are those the revolution claims to

combat in the struggle for greater autonomy of the Cuban people from the imperialist colonial ideologies. As a result, the state contradicts itself as it codifies and institutionalizes authentic representations of culture in national performance production.

The Cuban state's extreme preoccupation with the authentic representations of national Cuban culture goes as far as sending anthropologists to rural communities to investigate and observe cultural and ceremonial practices that have been preserved through generations. The communities visited are labeled by the state as *portadores/*carriers of "authentic" Cuban cultural practices. I learned of the official role of *portadores* while in conversation with a Cuban anthropologist who researches Afro-Cuban religions and cultures in the eastern region of Cuba. (Raúl Ruiz Mujais Interview September 1, 2005). The cultural practices of the *portadores* are deemed "authentic" by the state because these practices continue within the daily lives of specific Cuban communities and preserved tradition. It is in this context that state appointed "authenticity" emerges as problematic. On the one hand, it is important that the state takes action to preserve and resuscitate historically repressed culture, but as culture becomes institutionalized complications arise. The authentic label placed on popular culture denies the evolution of culture over time, a characteristic and defining principle of diasporic identities of the American nations. The actions taken by the state to celebrate and include authentic reproductions of the *portador* cultures in national performance culture works simultaneously to not only preserve but also stunt the evolution of identity and culture. The institutionalization of the *portador* cultures and communities defines and solidifies the most acceptable performances of Cuban cultural identity. National representations of culture are thus prescribed instead of contested and the confines of

state rhetoric continue to dictate and manage what cultural representations are valid in national performance spheres. This practice remains entrenched in a hegemonic ideology that determines one cultural form to be more legitimate than another. Cultures in question are severed from their social contexts and cease to be of the people as they become determined and defined by the state.

The concept that identity is constructed is taken a step further in the text *Appropriating Blackness* by E. Patrick Johnson. Chapter six in the text is entitled *Performance And/As Pedagogy.* Here the author analyzes the social norms surrounding ethnic identity and the ideologically entrenched performances of race and identity. The discussion describes a professor who speaks to his class about the effect of "colorblind casting", an artistic choice in which an actor of a specific color/race/ethnicity is chosen to play the role of a different race/color/ethnicity. Johnson analyses the effect of performances by both African American and non African American students of "black" texts that treat black culture and history. His examination of the students' reaction to the color blind casting and the performance of the text demonstrates how the body presents us with a set of new questions or perspectives regarding its relation to and occupation of the literary material. In short, our perspective of the performance and the social issues addressed depends on the racial identity of the person acting within the literary role. This demonstrates that race is a performative concept in and of itself. An explanation of the way in which the body performs identity is evident in the following citation that speaks specifically of cross racial casting and alludes to reasons why black Cubans are not participants in the ballet nor white Cubans participants in the national folklore companies. "the body also becomes a site of discursive signifying practices that

simultaneously dismantles hegemonic notions of race, class, gender, and sexual identity and exposes the constructed nature of such demarcations" (Johnson 2003, p.244). After 1959 the Cuban state outlawed racism and declared that all citizens are held equal in the eyes of the state. This political approach ceased to recognize the ideologies that mold the performative identifications linked to the body that Johnson demonstrates and explains here.

The idea of the body as a social signifier that holds or represents specific cultural and social norms is evident in the case of Mikal, the principle male dancer in the national dance company *Compañía Teatro de la Danza del Caribe.* His talent and strength as a dancer is an asset to the dance company but so is his physical form and racial identity as a tall, strong, Afro-Cuban male. This image fits perfectly the ever-present stereotype of black males that has a basis in slavery where strong black men and women were a prized commodity. His physique also epitomizes an identity that is central to the re-configuration of the national image of the modern Cuban state: to present the national culture in the image of the people and therefore, the inclusion of the Afro-Cuban heritage, body, and image in new national forms. The case of Mikal is an example of how certain dancers are chosen for specific professional roles. This was evident within the construction of the first modern dance company (see chapter two) where Ramiro Guerra chose 12 black dancers and 12 white to make up his initial group of dancers. These dancers were selected because of their skills as dancers as well as their equally important racial identity/physicality as a part of making a national social statement with the main recourse being the body.

The racialized agency of dancers is made evident in the professional opportunities afforded to graduates of the national schools who go on to perform in the national companies of the modern, folkloric, or cabaret nature. Their recruitment to a specific company and performance sphere depends upon, which province on the island they are from which in turn dictates where they will return to fulfill their community service requirement (a year long requirement of every university graduate in all disciplines). Dancers are selected to participate and perform in one company over another based upon their artistic, stylistic, and physical qualities that make them a good performer. It is in this arena that racial profiling is evident and prevalent. The darkest skinned dancers are often chosen as participants in folkloric companies because their identity fits the cultural image of the performance. This type of racial profiling occurs not only in the beginning of the dancers professional careers but also early on in their education. Young aspiring dancers are channeled to study and excel in specific dance forms and areas of professionalism based upon their skin color. The course of study they enter into at a young age determines the national performance arena in which they will be most likely to participate in their careers. Dark skinned dancers are almost never encouraged and often discouraged to study ballet in the national dance schools, whereas light skinned dancers are most often discouraged from pursuing a professional emphasis in folklore. This career training is one reason among the others I have already explored that the Cuban ballet remains primarily white and, conversely, national folkloric companies and modern dance companies employ the dancers of black/darker skin tones.

Racial profiling can also be seen in the selection of performers to represent national companies internationally. When I asked Mikal, the principal dancer I spoke of

previously, if he had ever worked outside of Cuba teaching or working under a foreign contract, as is often the case with professional Cuban dancers who are solicited to do work abroad, he replied, "No. El maestro no me deja aceptar ningun contracto de trabajo de lejos porque soy su principal negro de la compañía/ No. The director doesn't allow me to accept any job offer far away because I am his principal black male dancer of the company" (Mikal de Danza Caribe Interview September 7, 2006). Mikal, a black male, is central to the company image and portrayal of culture and therefore represents another instance in which I speculate a similar kind of racial profiling with respect to the experience of one of the lighter skinned dancers of the company. This dancer was one of the more highly skilled but was the dancer not participating in an upcoming international performance tour in Europe. When I asked her why she would not be participating in the tour she seemed bitter and avoided the question. I speculate that she does not represent the image the company wants to portray internationally. She was light-skinned and did not fit the Cuban image. Darker skin is considered to be more exotic, sensational, and of signature Cuban quality in the international market and therefore adds to the fascination, excitement, and vibrancy of what sells tickets in international performance tours.

These examples make evident that national performance is racialized even though the revolution claimed to have obliterated social identification based on race. The case of Mikal is unique in that he has extreme loyalty to Eduardo Rivero, the director of the *Danza Caribe*. Without Rivero, Mikal would never have received dance training nor become a professional dancer. He was originally the groundskeeper at the national school and was recognized as having a strong and flexible physique and a natural ability for coordinated movement. Rivero invited him to study with the company and train to be

a dancer. In turn, after many years with the company, he has become the principal male dancer. I speculate that Mikal does not stray from the company to greater opportunities abroad due to his strong sense of loyalty to the company, his nation, and Rivero himself. Any other dancer may entertain professional opportunities abroad with more seriousness and make the decision to defect from Cuba when traveling abroad. Many young professionals see it as being in the best interest of their careers and optimal for the financial support of their families (many Cubans survive from remittances received from abroad). This transnational aspect of the Cuban performance arts, artists, and authentic cultural representations is one that I will examine briefly in the conclusion of the thesis.

The failure to deconstruct the social norms supporting the codification of racially biased social roles is apparent with the incomplete integration of Afro-Cuban culture and people into all national spheres. It is certain that the revolution brought greater opportunity, exposure, and professionalism to black Cuban populations but, at the same time, reaffirmed and created contemporary versions of racialized stereotypes and social categories both nationally and internationally. This contradiction within the "egalitarian" revolutionary society and the proposed ideologies that were to have rid Cuba of its racist roots and introduce a new modern Cuban identity are unpacked clearly in the following statement:

> While the discourse of *mestizaje* and racial amalgamation nourishes Cuba's nationalism, and while the notion of *cubanidad* is built on the myth of racial synthesis, this symbolic reconciliation has repressed actual and continuing conflicts of race and their memory. Indeed, 20th century Cuban history, culture, and literature bear testimony to the uncanny reassertion of resistant diasporic black voices sublated into the dominant *mestizaje* nationalism. (Unknown)

This statement draws attention to the way in which the culture and rhetoric of equality did not permeate all spheres of Cuban society nor did it address the historical legacy that years of oppression had upon shaping the contemporary body politic and its social practices. The reconstruction of the cultural arts that includes Afro-Cuban bodies and cultural representation as well as increased access to jobs, housing, and education made an important national statement and dramatically changed the condition of life for Afro-Cubans. Unfortunately national discourse that addresses the repressive Cuban history and racist ideologies remains necessary for comprehensive social change. Flooding Cuban society and public spaces with the "celebration" of Afro-Cuban culture and identity was insufficient in making real social change.

Tony Perez, a prominent figure in the Santiago performance arts scene and former modern dancer of the original national company in *La Habana* commented on racial tensions, biases, and prejudices in Cuba that remain after the revolution. He stated, "in Cuba there is not racism, but instead racial complexity, it is impossible to erase hundreds of years of racially based discrimination in one day therefore the we must look more closely at the ways in which Afro-Cuban culture was incorporated and celebrated as part of Cuban culture" (Tony Perez Interview, August 24, 2005). Perez implies that the increased visibility, celebration, and integration of marginalized social groups produces a shift in national ideology and discourse, but these tactics alone cannot obliterate racism. Racialized identities, discourses, stereotypes, and biases within the Cuban culture remain complex and entrenched in colonial and post-colonial perspectives and therefore still exist despite the measures taken by the state to dispel and eradicate them. What is lacking is the affirmation that racist ideologies continue in greater Cuban society. A

deconstruction of these ideologies is necessary. I argue that the codification of Afro-Cuban culture perpetuates a historical stereotype as it contains Afro-Cuban cultural expression and ignores the complexity mentioned by Perez. The state-mandated national form has become the authentic and "correct" form, separating official national culture from that which is evolving and is practiced within the popular culture of the people. In short, the codification of cultural expression in national performance and dance technique has facilitated a contradiction in the way in which the incorporation of marginalized bodies and the expression of blackness have been legitimized in national and international performance spheres.

The utility of the black body and appropriation of Afro-Cuban inspired gesture and rhythm in national performance spheres raises important issues in the exploration of national concepts of cultural memory, history, and identity within institutionalized notions of Cuban identity. The birth of new national performance genres, like that of *danza moderna,* further institutionalizes popular cultural forms, traditions, and participants as each must negotiate the regulation of national identity as it is dictated by the state agenda. This agenda has molded the way in which specific production models, participants, and physical theatrical forms are fostered and/or "imagined" by artists and then communicated to public audiences. The national systems and institutions I have outlined in this chapter function to streamline the production of professionals and representations of Cuban culture that are deemed a necessary part of the national reconstruction project and revised national image. As the production of the arts and artists becomes a primary responsibility of the state complexities and contradictions arise. The performed dominant culture becomes a state representation of the people rather than

a production of the people themselves. Pre-revolutionary social discourse and ideology remains masked under the institutionalized celebration of the diverse Cuban Culture.

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[i] During the month I spent in the oriente/east of Cuba in Santiago de Cuba, I spent a great deal of time studying and speaking with Willian Danger Marquéz and his wife Belquis, two former professional dancers, teachers and advocates for the national arts and culture programs in Cuban scholastic institutions. They had been the teachers of several of the Cuban artists I have studied under in the United States and were integral participants in national artistic production in Santiago. We spoke at length about the distinct quality of dance performance arts in Cuba and the quality of the dancers and choreographers that have been produced within the educational opportunities created under the revolution. Willian and Belquis are not only former professional dancers and artistic collaborators, they remain important instructors in the schools and participate in the state recruitment of young dancers from the rural provinces to participate in the national dance education program. They affirmed during our conversations that the arts, at the time of the inception of the revolution, were something that have been used to *fortalecer/*strengthen the image and *conciencía*/consciousness of the pueblo/Cuban people. For this reason, the specific techniques developed to assert what is the most culturally "correct" served to standardize national performance and modern autonomous identity.

Thesis Conclusion:

Cuban performance arts are renowned for embodying the character and asserting the identity of the Cuban people and nation. The importance and responsibility of the arts as an educational and communication tool within society translates into the comprehensive and intense training of Cuban dancers. Therefore the strength of the nation's professional dance culture stems largely from the intense training of dancers who are disciplined as movers, artists, and cultural agents to represent the nation. The Cuban national schools and pedagogical structures produce bodies, movement, and performance productions of extremely high caliber that in turn express the national identity and its multiethnic culture. For this reason, dancers and artists in Cuba are held as important professionals in the national project; they are respected participants who work to uphold the social image and vitality of the nation as it is defined through the official culture and state agendas. In this respect, Cuban dancers have also become political agents who uphold the rigor and values of the revolution as they perform the codified national cultural image.

My investigation of the Cuban performing arts and the ways in which the Cuban modern identity is shaped, communicated, and institutionalized by the state reflects important aspects of how Cuba has developed as a socialist nation and asserted itself in the midst of a capitalist global market. Since the revolution, Cuba has promoted a hybrid national image that includes the backgrounds, cultures, and histories of its diverse populations. National discourses about the strength of a collective national identity have reinforced the importance of Cuban diversity so that the identity of the national is first

and foremost and supercedes all other racial, cultural, and historical identifications. In this way the national image that has been promoted by revolutionary rhetoric, presents a contradiction in which the diverse and multicultural aspects of the nation are emphasized but also homogenized: all Cubans are one people defined by their national identity and not their individual ethnic, cultural, or historical legacy. The overarching concept of the "national" and the state-managed celebration of multiculturalism that results from this perspective is central to the development of the national modern dance genre. The creation of Cuban modern dance performance art has led to the integration of Cuba in an international social movement in which the arts are the main media used to communicate and explore concepts of national, ethnic, and cultural identity, themes of utmost importance in modern Cuban society. As I have outlined from various angles throughout my thesis, it is the modern dance of Cuba (*danza moderna*) that strives to bring to the stage, and therefore public forums, a representation of Cuban diversity and the hybrid identity of the nation as it has been redefined in revolutionary rhetoric.

As Chapter 2 has shown, *danza moderna* embodies an artistic focus that blends diverse cultural and historical influences more comprehensively than other official national performance arts. Ballet, Afro-Cuban folklore, and popular dance, which represent individual components of Cuban culture, perform works that embody and emphasize specific aspects of Cuban culture rather than its hybrid roots. As an artistic and national expression, *danza moderna* symbolizes the unification of the diverse Cuban cultural components found in the diasporic roots of the Cuban people and culture. The initial development of the national modern dance form as a contemporary artistic expression was fed by the fervor and pioneering work of international artists of the

modern dance genre. These artists participated in an international arts-based social movement that re-inscribed the social function and purpose of dance and performance in dominant society and culture. Throughout chapter two's discussion of modern dance as part of a revolutionary popular expression within an international spectrum I related the social movement to the development and inspiration of *danza moderna.* I analyzed the course *danza moderna* took to become part of official Cuban national revolutionary culture in which I emphasized the important distinction between the two movements: international modern dance was a diverse artistic expression of social identity created by the artists themselves whereas *danza moderna* was a national art form created by artists but approved and managed by the state. In chapters two and three I examined and deconstructed the ideologies, influences, and contradictions that exist within *danza moderna* as a state managed creation, the growth of the art form, and social representation in modern day Cuban society.

As I conclude my inquiry of the way in which national culture and identity is sculpted, dictated, and portrayed through Cuban performance arts I propose a question that involves contemporary developments in national culture, *danza moderna* specifically. The Cuban revolutionary nation has developed socially and economically and negotiated itself in global markets with national expressions and cultural agendas of national performance. This has resulted in an alteration of the primary social function, artistic focus, and social representation of the national cultural arts in general. Developments in the national economic structure have necessitated changes in national culture and therefore positioned dance and performance art as not only the voice of revolutionary rhetoric, but also a means by which to attract foreign audiences and money

to the impoverished nation. It is in this respect that I inquire how such contemporary developments and national economic pressures have altered the role and function of the national arts and artists in contemporary Cuba.

Cuba's most recent economic struggles - a result of pressures caused by the U.S. embargo and the halt of Soviet economic support after the 1989 break up of the U.S.S.R. – have caused a shift in the focus and social and economic purpose of the national cultural arts (Moore R. 2004, pp.226-228). This shift has created a divide in national opinion of what constitutes official national artistic production. The dispute is most apparent in ongoing debates about contemporary cultural productions of *danza moderna*. As a result, the Cuban modern dance community has evolved into two factions: those who advocate maintaining the purity and integrity of the original *danza moderna* form and its highly specific communication of Cuban national identity and those who argue for greater experimentation in movement, performance, and dance technique as a more accurate representation of contemporary culture. The latter group of artists, choreographers, and performers, known in Cuba as those who produce works of the *danza contemporánea* and *danza teatro* genre, advocate for change in the social purpose and form of modern dance. They support the creation of artistic productions that represent a collective modern Latin American experience as well as the expression of the human experience in general expanding the scope of artistic inspiration beyond national boundaries. Critics of recent artistic developments within the *danza contemporánea* /*danza teatro* genre accuse these contemporary artists of following in the footsteps of North American and European artists who are experimenting with multi-media performance as well as experimental dance techniques and thus of returning to colonial

ideologies in which European and North American cultural models were imposed upon Cuban national expression (Willian Danger Marquéz and his wife Belquis Interview, August 27, 2005). These critics also view recent artistic developments as an abandonment of the Afrocentric production models that were approved, celebrated, and promoted by the state at the onset of the revolution in the effort to acknowledge marginalized cultures and populations for their contribution to national culture and form.[i]

On the other hand, artists who advocate for change in national artistic expression, including the introduction of contemporary experimental form, see these new artistic models and experimentation as a more accurate representation of contemporary Cuban culture as it exists within an international spectrum and, in turn, criticize those in favor of maintaining the traditional form. They argue that traditional artists are stuck in dated representations of a national image and form that no longer speak to the experience and identity of contemporary Cuba, nearly fifty years after the revolution (Bustos Interview, January 3, 2006).

The desire to expand the understanding of Cuban identity as it is communicated through dance and cultural performance is part of a process to imagine identity in a way in which it is not confined by national geographic borders but instead as it exists within a transnational perspective. This transnational perspective is apparent in the contemporary developments of international modern dance as artistic experimentation branches into new modes of physical expression, performance, technical style and movement philosophy that are all part of a larger transnational arts dialog and creative exchange. It is with this perspective that contemporary developments in national culture and art are not bound by national borders. Instead, they engage in the expression of identity and

culture from the perspective of the transnational experiences of diasporic populations that transgress the imagined and artificially constructed national boundaries. It is through this artistic approach toward understanding the expression of identity and the human condition that contemporary artists in Cuba have been inspired to broaden the scope and creativity of *danza moderna* to include new contemporary dance forms and movement experimentation.

As notions of Cuban identity evolve and become understood in ways that transcend its expression through the original Cuban experimental dance form, *danza contemporánea* like *danza moderna* several decades ago, is unfolding to become an important contemporary development and popular voice in Cuba that deserves exploration. It challenges the codified norms of the official *danza moderna* performance art that I explored in chapter two and draws artistic inspiration from experimentation taking place in an international spectrum. In order to further my inquiry of how Cuban arts promote specific qualities, forms, and bodies within Cuban culture and national identity it is important to explore where new developments in artistic performance and national production are headed. While *danza contemporánea* challenges the structure and social themes of *danza moderna,* it also employs a similar emphasis in which all artistic material and dialog is derived from *el pueblo*/the people. This mainstay of Cuban arts and creative inspiration is evident in the annual festival of dance, "*Ciudad en Movimiento"* that is organized by *Danza-Teatro Retazos,* a contemporary Cuban dance company based in *La Habana*/Havana. The company has abandoned the codified national technique of *danza moderna* and performs a contact-oriented movement technique that incorporates acrobatic floor-work as well as elaborate costumes, props,

and an element of theatrical performance that are all as much a part of the artistic message as the dance/movement that is performed.

The festival occurs outside in newly renovated public areas of *La Habana Vieja/* old Havana*,* a bustling area of the capital city where Cubans and tourists pass through and gather. Juan Eduardo, a coordinator of the festival commented in an interview on the purpose of performances that do not take place on the proscenium stage and therefore produce a different experience and interaction between the performers and spectators. Instead, dances are performed in the heart of urban public spaces: "De alguna forma las ciudades se vuelvan más humanas, más creativas, más imaginativas y nosotros, como habitantes de esta ciudad la defendamos por su creatividad e imaginación/ in a certain way cities become more human, more creative, more imaginative, and we, as inhabitants of the city, defend it for its creativity and imagination." (Danza Retazos 2005, Publicity DVD). As artists occupy and perform in public spaces, a symbiotic relationship occurs in which the spectators become part of the performance. In the festival, Cuban dance companies of all genres perform with international companies from Latin America, North America, and Europe. The dancer and choreographer Sabine Jamet involved in the project explained in an interview the purpose and idea behind making choreography that is to be performed in public spaces in the following. "De repente, o sea, se puede mover el baile, se puede sentir el baile como público, digo, personas que pasan por la calle y de repente le pasa algo pero no es solo con los ojos, es con algo más./suddenly, that is, one could change the dance, one can feel the dance as an audience or the people that pass through the streets that, all of a sudden, one can experience something not only with his/her eyes, it is with something more" (Danza Retazos 2005, Publicity DVD). This

comment demonstrates the idea and methodology of this specific type of production of *danza contemporánea* that deconstructs classic ideas of performance as they have been traditionally understood as a presentation to a paying public on the proscenium stage. As well, it furthers the idea and campaign by the Cuban government to make the arts more accessible to the people. As spectators and dancers collaborate in the creative process a symbiotic relationship occurs between the two groups blurring social boundaries so that spectators are just as much a part of the performance as are the dancers. In this way performances can never be repeated exactly because each time the interaction will be different. Therefore the performance acts as a reflection of the human experience and its dynamic quality. In many ways, such artistic performances relate to the ways in which dance has served as an element of communication within the community. As mentioned in chapter three, many cultures celebrate and communicate identity and tradition through music and dance.

The development of these competing artistic schools of thought (*danza moderna and danza contemporánea/danza teatro*) and the social inquiries that drive them have occurred simultaneously with another fundamental shift in the social purpose of national performance and expression that also deserves further exploration. As the Cuban economy has become dependent on foreign currency international tourism has become the main source for bringing money into the country. Therefore, the state management of the official national performance arts has become preoccupied with appealing to foreigners, thus gearing the goal of the work of national companies to the satisfaction and attraction of foreign audiences. Robin Moore explains this phenomenon in his comment that is more specific to Cuban musicians and concert performances but is relevant to

dancers and dance performances as well. "The growing numbers of visitors has benefited entertainers, resulting in additional job opportunities. However, it has had unpleasant consequences for the population as a whole. Havana and other cities are increasingly divided into foreign currency entertainment areas intended primarily for tourists and others for Cubans themselves" (Moore 2004, p. 230). Moore's comment makes clear that the arts have become a commodity for sale in Cuban society. Artists and dancers are afforded greater mobility in and out of the country as they are contracted to perform internationally and they also have increased access to the tourist public with whom they are able to make money giving private classes in music and dance.

During my investigation of Cuban performing arts, specifically *danza moderna*, I have examined how arts in Cuba are shaped to promote and perpetuate cultural qualities and social understanding within Cuban culture and national identity. With a global perspective in mind, however, it is also important to inquire where new developments in artistic performance and national production are headed and to ask the question: "How are Cuban culture and Cuban artists/performers universal commodities?" Tourists, cultural groups, foreign choreographers, students, and researchers like me contribute to the predominantly Cuban tourist economy in search of classes, performances, workshops, and interviews that involve and focus upon the highly developed and unique national arts. This international interest in Cuban culture and national performance has facilitated the growth of transnational exchanges of culture, dance, music, information, and people between Cuba and international markets. As a result, the development of contemporary creative work and the agency of Cuban artists and dancers has shifted with new foreign interests. Therefore, future research in this vein would involve a continuation of my

investigation that explores the influence of national agendas upon what constitutes the Cuban national expression in contemporary terms in light of the tourist-based economic climate and its effect on Cuban artists as they integrate in a global market and arts community.

An important part of future investigation on this topic would need to include a perspective that examines the fascination with Cuban culture and cultural performance arts in international spheres that focuses predominantly upon the Afro-Cuban elements of the national culture that are emphasized in both *danza moderna* and the performances of national folklore companies. The draw toward these aspects of Cuban culture, in my opinion, is not only part of a larger global trend and fascination with Afro-Latin studies and African diasporic cultures, but also a result of the "folklorization" of Afro-Cuban culture that I have described in my analysis of Katherine Hagedorn's work *Divine Utterances* and throughout the chapters of this study. Further, as I wrote in Chapter three, the Cuban state's preoccupation, promotion, and celebration of African diasporic cultures and black bodies is a central component in the production of the hybrid identity of Cuba. This specific promotion of culture has reached beyond national boundaries and has become a means through which Cuba attracts tourists to the nation to experience the unique and exotic performances of the culture and history of the Cuban people. Cuba becomes increasingly preoccupied with the marketability of culture that, in combination with the national agenda to incorporate a celebration of marginalized people in society, further re-inscribes the role, agency, and image of black bodies in national culture and therefore the global market. Black artists are limited to participation in specific cultural arts productions and genres based upon the cultural image and social message their

bodies portray. This focus adds to the growing global commodification/exoticization of dark-skinned dancers, musicians, entertainers, and actors as national icons and furthers the appropriation and sensationalization of the black body and culture in the global spectrum. The effect of this kind of commodification and marketing of culture is seen in the contemporary practice of culture and historical traditions as they have commodified themselves in pursuit of tourist currency. An investigation into how these international interests have changed the practice and social function of Afro Cuban cultures, as well as negotiations of racial identification within the marketing of Cuban culture, is an important part of this discussion and in need of further investigation.

As I conclude this thesis with questions that provoke further inquiry I consider the dynamic state in which Cuba exists nationally and globally. It is as if the modern world is waiting and watching to see what will become of Cuba and the revolution in future years without Fidel. In the meantime, it is important that the focus remain on what has developed over the years since the "triumph" of the revolution and how the nation continues to negotiate itself nationally and internationally. The arts and their historical origins are an important link for Cuba to the world that surrounds it. This link is embedded in the celebration of the diversity of the nation that remains entrenched in the contradiction that defines the national project: the homogenous definition of the body politic that erases social difference but that simultaneously celebrates and sensationalizes its unique and complex culture, ethnic heritage, and history attaching specific political and economic agendas to Cuban bodies. As the official national cultural arts continue to be of utmost national importance both ideologically and economically, it is necessary to notice the ways in which the arts are emphasized by the state and how this agenda may

have changed over the years as the interests of the state have changed. As the understanding of global culture becomes more transnational so does the understanding of national identity and culture as contemporary Cuban artistic inquiries are influenced by artistic work beyond Cuba's borders. As the national experience changes so do the arts and the social spaces in which modern dance is developed and performed. *Danza moderna* provides an important and overlooked platform for investigating and analyzing Cuba and its development as a modern nation while the investigation of *danza contemporánea* presents a platform from which to examine the direction in which Cuban culture and national arts are headed.

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[i] An effort to keep the integrity of *danza moderna* pure and "Cuban" as it is defined by the original model of artistic expression is part of this critique and is explained in detail in the discussion of authentic cultural representation that I explored in chapter three.

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