Dangerous Encounters, Ambiguous Frontiers

Dance, Sex, and Intimacy in Nineteenth-Century Cuba

Pilar Egüez Guevara

University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, Champaign, U.S.A.

peguez2@illinois.edu; pilareguez@gmail.com

Abstract

Dance balls, masquerades, and street carnivals functioned as frontier spaces of otherwise reprehensible encounters between people of different gender, race, and class. I examine dance as a dense point of contact in nineteenth-century Cuba by showing how dance served ruling elites as a disciplining instrument to enforce social and legal boundaries, and was simultaneously used by colonial subjects as a tactic of survival to navigate these barriers. Because dancing lent itself to situations of intimacy and misrecognition, it challenged Cuban ruling elites' efforts to police dancing bodies. Dance is offered as a useful methodological venue to illuminate the predicament of the colonial state in governing colonial subjects and bodies. I offer the case of colonial Cuba as a contribution to the study of contact zones and colonial intimacies in Latin America and the Caribbean, in a much-needed examination of the relationships between imperialism, sexuality, and the governance of dance.

Keywords

Colonial Cuba – dance – sexuality – gender – cross-dressing – contact-zones – carnival

Introduction

Dance venues were among the numerous sites in the colonial context operating as cultural “frontier spaces”; that is, they marked social boundaries but also served as “contact zones” or sites of encounter and conflict in which conventions of social distance and of the terms of hierarchy were negoti-

ated.¹ Anthropologists Sidney Mintz and Richard Price (1976) anticipated more recent discussions in colonial studies about these “points of contact” in the theorization of colonial relations, modalities of domination and negotiation of identities. Mintz and Price considered colonial politics and relations in complex, multisited fields of power, including those that Anne Stoler (using Foucault) deemed “the microphysics of daily lives” (Stoler 2002).

In particular, Mintz and Price paid attention to ruling-classes’ anxieties derived from “the role of the powerless in affecting and controlling important parts of the lives of masters” (Mintz & Price 1976:31). Points of contact between colonizers and colonized were part of everyday life in Cuba’s slave society. Black servants and free workers made colonial bourgeois life possible through their work at kitchens, in dormitories and homes, at the plantations, in the military, in the construction of city buildings and facilities as well as through the provision of those facilities as tailors, dentists, teachers, musicians, among many others. More specifically, in the context of rapid expansion of cities since the early nineteenth century, Havana offered numerous opportunities of close contact between socially unequal subjects. Public dance balls and religious gatherings at plazas and churches, among other venues provided opportunities for otherwise inadmissible proximity, particularly between men and women of different class and race. These contact zones challenged the ruling classes’ efforts to secure strict systems of hierarchy in place in a context of profound instability marked by slave uprisings and struggles for liberation. While every boundary worked to reproduce the social order, it also created opportunities of contravention, resistance, and subversion. From this perspective, boundaries operated as points of contact or “dense transfer points of power” where social relations were made and negotiated (Foucault 1978:103; Stoler 2001:831).

Anne Stoler further problematized colonial contact zones by examining situations of intimacy happening in everyday venues of sociability. Stoler understands intimacy as those “tense and tender ties,” or affective bonds and moral sentiments, that served as important sites of colonial intervention and negotiation of identities. Intimate situations are those proximities of power—close encounters, unspoken knowledge, in closed quarters—in which racialized differences are made (Stoler 2001:831). Her analysis centers on the affective aspects of intimacy more often in domestic situations and arrangements. I build on Stoler’s framework by examining intimate situations in a wide range of settings beyond strictly domestic spaces, in and through locations where colonial relations of domesticity traveled. I approach instances of intimacy as those

1 Kingman 2006; McClintock 1995; Pratt 2007; Stoler 2002.

spaces and situations of physical proximity and distance that exceeded socially established (or imagined) limits in the highly stratified spaces and society in nineteenth-century Cuba. These instances of intimacy may also be understood in the words of Anne McClintock as those that occupied “threshold zones on the border between factory and family, labor and domesticity, where the public world of propertied power and the private world of familial decorum met their conceptual limit” (McClintock 1995:119).

As a contribution to the discussion of contact zones, spaces of intimacy, and the governance of sexuality in the colonial context, this article examines the governance of dance as one of many, yet largely unexamined points of contact in nineteenth-century colonial Cuba. Dance balls, masquerades, and street carnivals functioned as frontier spaces of otherwise reprehensible encounter between men and women, free and enslaved, Whites and people of color. I offer examples of how dance was used by ruling elites as a disciplining mechanism to enforce social and legal boundaries, as well as by colonial subjects as a tactic of survival and a strategy to navigate these barriers. Building on previous works in Latin America and the Caribbean, I situate dance in the context of policies of interracial marriage and prostitution legislation, as a set of governance mechanisms conforming a broad project to police (female) sexuality in the interest of preserving white supremacy and colonial rule in nineteenth-century Cuba (Briggs 2002; Findlay 1999). However, because dancing lent itself to situations of intimacy, mis-recognition, and slipperiness among socially unequal subjects, it challenged Cuban ruling elites’ efforts to police dancing bodies. In this sense, dance becomes a useful methodological venue to visualize the predicament of the colonial state in governing colonial bodies, and their sexuality.

I offer an anthropological reading and discursive analysis of selected primary and secondary evidence about dance gatherings and street carnivals in sources dated between 1840s and 1870s, including ruling statutes, literary and travel accounts, and archival documents drawn from government criminal records found at the Cuban National Archive (ANC).² In the tradition of anthropology and cultural studies, I read the selected pieces of evidence as cultural texts and narratives that speak to and about larger sociocultural processes of racial and sexual identification, anxiety, and social control that marked the atmosphere of colonial rule in Cuba during the nineteenth century. I use secondary sources to unpack and critically interpret discourses about dance gatherings

2 Archival references were obtained from criminal records located at the “Public Performances” (*Espectáculos públicos*) section of the record collection *Fondo de gobierno superior civil* (Government collection) of the Cuban National Archive (ANC).

by placing them in the sociopolitical and historical context with the relevant colonial legislation and social conventions. I also offer context by discussing dance venues in relation to other accounts of colonial anxiety in the city related to public plazas and crowds which operated similarly as threshold zones of dangerous social encounters.³ In alignment with postcolonial critiques of epistemology and method in anthropology and history,⁴ the analysis of primary sources focuses less on the content and more on the form of the evidence, that is, on the significance of the events described in the documents within the broader political atmosphere of racial and sexual colonial control tactics and negotiations. In this sense, my analysis makes historical documents speak to and about the sociopolitical conditions in which the stories contained therein were produced (Trouillot 1995). In doing so, the analysis aims to expand an understanding of the complex negotiations of power, culture, and ideology that specific events and their narratives stood by.

I start off the discussion in the first section with an overview of the racially motivated efforts behind state and social regulations of dance and dance venues in the context of nineteenth-century slave society. I examine efforts to govern dancing black bodies as control measures for potential political organizing in the face of impending black upheavals around midcentury. I argue that efforts to police dance activities among people of color, both free and enslaved, reflected the predicaments and contradictions of Spanish imperial rule in a colony striving toward modernity via a capitalist agro-industrial enterprise dependent on the forced labor of Blacks in Cuba.

From gauging the political atmosphere of racial anxiety surrounding dance in the first section, the second section turns attention to the specifically sexual anxieties driving efforts of white elites to police dancing between Blacks and Whites in dance academies in Havana. I examine narratives about interracial dancing including requests to colonial government authorities for dance licenses by Havana residents at midcentury. I situate these narratives in the broader context of ruling elites' efforts to enforce prostitution and interracial marriage regulation. I argue that dancing was ultimately a narrative of anxiety about interracial sex and prostitution, and that the three were constitutive elements of a broad project of regulation of sexuality enforced by the state and white elites throughout the racially conflicted nineteenth-century in Cuba.

In the last section, I examine masquerade balls at mid-nineteenth century as one among several instances of cross-class-gender-racial encounters or "con-

3 Bakhtin 1984; Kingman 2006; McClintock 1995; Stallybrass & White 1986.

4 Behar & Gordon 1995; Burton 2003; Loomba 2005; Trouillot 1995.

tact zones.”⁵ In colonial Havana, masked balls took place during carnival season. Carnival celebrations had a reputation among elites and authorities as “feasts that transgressed the order” and allowed the confusion of class hierarchies and distinctions and also “made them suitable for the uprisings against the established powers” (Iglesias Utset 2003:67). In his social history of the Brazilian *maxixe*, the Argentinian *milonga* and the Cuban *danzón*, John Chasteen made a strong case about the fundamentally transgressive character of public dances, which made them highly controversial and subject to heavy regulation by authorities and elites. According to Chasteen, carnival dances were venues *par excellence* for cross-class sexual encounters “because they were public, because disguises hid faces and clothing, and because of the anything-goes carnival ethos itself” (Chasteen 2004:134). Speaking to these broader debates on Latin American national rhythms, I examine a case in colonial Havana at midcentury, of the state persecution of a group of black men for dancing cross-dressed as women to approach white women at the street carnival. I use this case to discuss the ideological context of racial, gender, and class dynamics at play during carnival season in nineteenth-century Havana. I find that the momentary relaxation of social norms produced by disguised bodies stirred concerns from authorities and white elites about the “confusion of classes” at these and other city venues. I link this discussion with an examination of lesser-studied representations and silences created around situations of intimacy between one of the most dangerous of colonial cross-class-racial-gender encounters, that which happened between black men and white women. This research builds on classic historiographical scholarship on gender, sexuality, and dance in Latin America and the Caribbean, offering a much-needed discussion on the relationships between imperialism, sexuality, and the governance of dance, which haven’t been examined yet for the case of colonial Cuba.⁶

Dance and Politics

A file dated from January 10, 1848 at the ANC Government collection describes the decision by the Civil Superior Governor of Spain in Cuba “to allow in the plantations the tangos [traditional dances] of the blacks, which were suppressed since the conspiracy of the people of color in 1844.” This resolution

5 Kingman 2006; McClintock 1995; Pratt 2007; Stoler 2006.

6 Bliss 2001:24; Briggs 2002:278; Findlay 1999:316; Guy 2000:216.

responded affirmatively to the request to allow reinstating the dances that colonial authorities regularly allowed among slaves, which was brought to the lieutenant governor by several planters of the municipality of Alacranes in the western province of Matanzas. In their petition, the planters emphasize “how convenient it would be to allow in slavery, that distraction [the dances] with the precautions stated in the regulations for slaves.”⁷ The regulations for slaves stated that dances were allowed to Blacks in the plantations (“negros del campo”) on festive days in the afternoons under the surveillance of the foremen “or other white people” to prevent disorder as well as to avoid the admission of Blacks from nearby plantations (Valdés 1842:18).

The events described in this document are particularly significant in the context of the mentioned conspiracy of 1844—a decisive turning point in nineteenth-century race politics in Cuba. After the demise of the sugar industry in recently liberated neighboring Haiti at the turn of the nineteenth century, Cuba’s sugar boom propelled the massive importation of African slaves. By 1827 free and enslaved Blacks outnumbered white Cuban-born creoles, Spanish immigrants, and authorities on the island. With the prosperity of the sugar industry and the growing slave trade the number and extent of slave uprisings also grew. Fear and anxiety about the possibility of a black takeover similar to Haiti motivated a series of segregation and repressive measures on the part of creole elites and the colonial state over the first half of the nineteenth century.⁸

In this context, in 1844 colonial authorities executed a number of free black ringleaders accused of organizing an alleged black plot uncovered in Havana and Matanzas to overthrow white colonial rule in Cuba. The episode became known as the conspiracy of *La Escalera*. Hundreds of free Blacks were tortured, imprisoned, expropriated, jailed, and exiled, and other thousands of free and enslaved Blacks were forced to confess their own or others’ involvement in the supposed plot. Nearly all the most influential and rich free Blacks and *mulatos* in Havana were implicated in the conspiracy. Many of them were educated and well-reputed artists and professionals (deemed “artisans”) who actively participated in Havana’s elite white culture as dance orchestra directors, fashion designers, and writers.⁹ Given the strong presence of this free-black middle class in Havana’s entertainment scene, music and dance activity in the years following the repression of *La Escalera* was severely affected. Historians report

7 ANC, Fondo de Gobierno Superior Civil, Leg 997, No. 34492, 1848.

8 Barcia 2009; Childs 2006; Chapeaux & Pérez de la Riva 1974:282; Paquette 1988.

9 Barcia 2009; Childs 2006; Chapeaux & Pérez de la Riva 1974:282; Paquette 1988.

that it was almost impossible to staff a dance orchestra in Cuba due to the large number of imprisoned musicians of color (Lapique Becali 1979; Sublette 2004).

However, the tangos mentioned in the cited record file were not urban salon dances where the wealthier, lighter skinned free Blacks played creolized versions of European music. Rather, they were gatherings of African slaves in sugar plantations located in the surroundings of the western part of Cuba as well as in outskirt city neighborhoods of Matanzas and Havana. These periodic public gatherings of African free men and slaves “to dance to the tune of their drums” (as a historian defined tangos in 1836) were exceptionally sanctioned in the colonial legislation to take place on Sundays and religious holidays, particularly during Epiphany (January 6, Day of Kings) and carnival (Pichardo 1836). The tangos took the form of dance gatherings at *cabildo* houses and street parades where Africans played drums, danced in costumes, representing a Spanish court, including a king, a queen, various officers, masked *diablitos* (dancing devils), and many other characters. These and other activities were organized by African mutual aid societies or *cabildos* originally created by colonial authorities as spaces of social control, but later turned into sites of resistance where Blacks in Cuba exchanged ideas and planned rebellions.¹⁰

Like the *cabildos*, dancing in Havana’s slave society served both as tactic of survival and a tactic of governance, a practice of imperial resistance and a disciplinary practice. Dancing had historically served as a survival tactic for enslaved Africans in the colonies. Colonial accounts reference what Ned Sublette calls “dances of survival” of Africans during the transatlantic passage. The regimen of dancing on deck was a kind of prison-yard exercise that slave dealers conceded the enslaved, allowing them to dance to the playing of drums, in a fleeting moment of “freedom.” “If there had been no drum on board ... there would have been no slavery. Because not one negro would have arrived alive,” reads a testimony gathered by notable oral historian of Cuba, Lydia Cabrera (Cabrera 1979:50; Sublette 2004:76). In fact, dancing was the only group activity permitted to Blacks in Cuba (Mena 2005; Valdés 1842). Like the *cabildos*, sanctioning dancing had a political function. As noted by the planters in their request to the municipal governor, allowing festivals served to ease tensions and increase the productivity of slaves by offering an opportunity to disperse and tolerate strenuous working conditions on plantations (Barcia 2009). However, following the 1844 repression, the tangos had been banned as a *precautionary* measure for future, potential slave insurgencies and conspiracies—the same conspiracies that had *motivated* the repression in the first place. In a way, for colonial

10 Barcia 2009; Childs 2006; Finch 2015; Sublette 2004.

authorities and Cuban creole elites, dancing was (much like what was said of prostitution around those same years) a “necessary evil” that ought to be allowed to any tolerable extent (McCabe 2003). As such, dancing encapsulated the predicaments and contradictions of the Spanish empire in one of its last colonies, Cuba, striving for modernity via a capitalist agro-industrial enterprise dependent on slavery.

In fact, the public sounds and visual spectacle of Africans dancing in city venues were viewed as unacceptable by white elites’ Europeanized standards. Since the early nineteenth century, creole elites and colonial authorities had invested the profits from sugar and slave sales in modern neoclassical style buildings, fountains, promenades, first-class theaters, and other facilities in the city. As part of the urban reordering that Havana’s modernization entailed, cabildos and their dances, like other “public” activities and subjects such as prostitutes and vagrants, were gradually pushed to the outskirts of the city in response to persistent protests by residents of the scandal of their “infernal” sounds and “savage” performances (Barcia 2009; Montalvo 2008; Venegas 1990).

Nonetheless, beyond purely aesthetic concerns, alleged conspiracies masked behind tolerated spaces for dance motivated measures to control black dance gatherings. For instance, historian Luz Mena refers to a royal order issued on October 29, 1839 that indefinitely suspended all permissions for dance academies for Blacks to avoid their use “by ungovernable elements as a possible pretext to gather in public” (Mena 2005:143). According to the file, the royal order followed the uncovering of a secret society of free black and enslaved men and women gathered around ideas of democracy, individual rights, and revolution. The group had regular meetings in 1838 and 1839 under a city license to practice dance in the academy called “Nuestra Señora de los Dolores” (Our Lady of Sorrows), which was held in the living room of a black woman’s house (Mena 2005:142–43).

In her recent study about *La Escalera* conspiracy, Aisha Finch demonstrated that dance played a role in the religious ceremonies and rituals that galvanized slave rebellions in the region of Matanzas. The rituals were part of organized insurgent activities in which black slaves invoked spirits upon wishes to take up arms against or destroy their white overseers. In these instances, she notes “music, dance, ritual, and rebellion converged explosively as the assembled slaves attempted to exact their own forms of justice” (Finch 215:216–17).

This section, “Dance and Politics,” offered a broad overview of the political and racial context and implications of colonial regulations of dance and dance venues in nineteenth-century Cuban slave society. However, beyond the anxieties about impending black upheavals that haunted elites, dancing and carnival celebrations were spaces of anxiety over equally powerful fears about racial

miscegenation. As some of Cuba's earliest nationalists objected, the tragedy of a black takeover could come more violently by way of armed uprising, or more gradually through the progressive darkening of the Cuban population by way of sexual unions between Blacks and Whites. Against the backdrop of racial anxiety and political unrest, the following section turns attention to the underlying sexual logic driving colonial legislation regulating dance, marriage, and prostitution throughout the Cuban nineteenth century.

Dance and Sex

An archival file dated December 26, 1848 reports the cancellation of a license granted to Don Ramon Cabral, a white lieutenant retiree, to hold a dance gathering at his home in the municipality of Arroyo Naranjo in Havana. The captain general listed the following reasons for the cancellation,

The Capitan of [the neighborhood of] Arroyo Naranjo says that at 11 pm [of December] 24 he suspended a dance that was held in the house of Dn. Ramon Cabral where there were some women of color dancing with white men ... [the men] did not carry [transit] license, for which he imposed the fines of four pesos each, according to the decree of the 28 of June of 1848 ... Having violated the permit that he had been granted to hold dances on Christmas [*pascua*] and not on Christmas eve, in addition to having violated the *bando de buen gobierno* [police edict], being united [*uniéndose*] in the dance *pardas*¹¹ with white men, let the fees be made effective and the dance license granted for Christmas is revoked.¹²

Three reasons are given for adopting disciplining measures. The men at the dance were not carrying their individual "transit licenses," the dance was taking place in advance of the date for which it was granted, and finally, white men had been "caught" dancing with women of color. Regulations for all these actions were stated in different versions of the colonial government edicts or *Bandos de gobernación y policía* (Valdés 1842). Current in the nineteenth century and revised periodically, the *bandos* were the rules that had been enforced since 1792 by the maximum authority, the captain general, for all

11 In nineteenth-century Cuba, *parda* and *mulata* were categories denoting lighter color and/or mixed ancestry.

12 ANC, Fondo de Gobierno Superior Civil, Leg 997 No. 34487, 1848. This and other translations are by author.

aspects pertaining to the city's organization. These included management of the dead, waste, food, water, as well as of the conduct, place, and responsibilities of city dwellers including children, slaves, street vendors, dances, theaters, coachmen, police inspectors, among others. Particularly under the rule of Capitan General Miguel Tacón (a four-year period starting in 1834) and Jose Gutiérrez de la Concha (during most of the 1850s), regulation of public spaces extended from license fees for the operation of small businesses, to surveillance of leisure activities and expressions of popular culture such as circuses, theater (and theaters), dance, and entertainment activities (such as cock-fights, bull-fights, baseball games, card games, and gambling) (McCabe 2003). Other activities considered immoral and dangerous such as prostitution and "vagrancy" were also heavily regulated in these and specific sets of police edicts. The motives behind these measures were to some extent to obtain economic gain via fees, but more importantly to preserve what they referred to as "*tranquilidad pública*" (public tranquility), "*decoro*" (decorum), and "*moralidad*" (morality) among "*personas decentes*," decent white Havana residents. The notion of "tranquility" reflected elite's concerns over the growing population of African descent and the opportunities that spaces of sociability opened for political organization of the black classes against white colonial rule.

Racial and class segregation was one measure to enforce control and secure the colonial social order in the rapidly growing public spaces of Havana. Indeed early century Havana had a "topographic network" of spaces of sociability made up of emergent and stratified city venues including dance balls, theaters, cafes, circuses, lottery and game houses, and taverns, among others (Stallybrass & White 1986). Since the 1820s and 1830s, these modern public venues opened up opportunities for social differentiation. For instance, through promenading, theater going, and outdoor shopping in newly built modern venues, middle- and upper-class white men and women cultivated urbanity and "good" taste (Egüez Guevara 2015; Venegas 1990). During this time, textbooks of conduct became crucial instruments of the creole bourgeoisie to build class specific identities according to spatialized performances in the city. These spaces and practices contrasted with lower-status café attendance and tavern gatherings (primarily white, male spaces); cockfights and cuna dance balls (of mixed race attendance) or cabildo gatherings (exclusively black) (Hazard 1871; Riaño San Marful 2002).

In spite of this complex system of stratification, separating people by race and class was not sufficient in a city known for its passion for dancing. At the city dances, encounters between men and women of different class and race added yet another element of panic to white elites' specters of an impending "Africanization" of Cuba. In Havana, dancing was ubiquitous, at least in

the prudish eyes of white creole writers reporting at least fifty daily dances in Havana early in the century, which only increased by the century's end (Ferrer 1965). Dances of different kinds and motives (at theaters and residences—masked, public, society; and open air—parish fairs, street carnival) and for different social classes (all White, wealthy free Blacks, lower-class mixed race, African), suited the many needs, tastes, and social status of the highly stratified Havana society (Chasteen 2004; Mena 2005; Sublette 2004). As moralists lamented, anything served as a pretext for dancing in Havana and everyone took part in it (Betancourt 1985:363–70; Ferrer 1965).

In this context, legislation regulating dance, marriage, and prostitution throughout the nineteenth century were part of a broad system of colonial moral governance and regulation of sexuality. Dancing and dance spaces were subject to colonial surveillance not only because they masked potential political subversion, but also because they allowed transgressions to established gender, class, and racial norms. To ruling elites, the interracial and gender proximities occurring at dance places appeared politically threatening for the possibility they opened up for romantic relations and sexual encounters with the “other” race and class. For example, sociologist Angel Quintero Rivera discussed how creole elites in nineteenth-century Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic shared similar sexual/racial anxieties regarding the *danza*, also referred to as *merengue* at the time. In his analysis Quintero highlights elite narratives about the potential dangerousness (“*el peligro de la posibilidad*”) of the *danza* as a “pantomime” of the “amorous process” and the prolonged intimacy enabled by the close embrace characteristic of couple dancing. Dancing to the *danza* in couples allowed a “set of conditions,” for which, some writers warned, “it is good to be prepared” (Quintero Rivera 2009:226; Baerga 2015). In the context of slave societies in the Caribbean, these kinds of “inevitable” erotic encounters between racially diverse partners in couple dancing to local rhythms drove anxieties about potential sexual encounters that could follow. As Mintz and Price observed, sexual contact between the slave and the master class was the “most serious threat of all—slave revolution—to the plantation ideal” (Mintz & Price 1976:30).

In fact, racial miscegenation was a state security concern under the premise that offspring from mixed unions increased the population of color. Furthermore, the wide range of shades that characterized the offspring of unions between Blacks and Whites created an ambiguous category, which made racial classification and colonial control difficult or sometimes impossible. Given the conflicting racial atmosphere informed by fears of revolts and claims for abolition, mixed unions and other forms of simultaneous racial and gender proximity were perceived to place white colonial establishment at risk. Accord-

ingly, in 1803 legislation to restrict marriages among individuals from different race and class status was implemented. From then until 1881, parental consent was required for approving marriages until the legal age (twenty-three for men and twenty-five for women). Authorities alleged that unions between persons of unequal “caste” (a legal category denoting race and class status) “tainted” the family’s honor and jeopardized the “integrity of the State” (Stolcke 1989:11; Abreu García 2008).

At the center of this imperial complex of sexuality governance was the concern for protecting white women’s bodies. Conventional gender norms centered upon ideas of women’s “sexual purity” and “honor.” Strict control over white women’s bodies and their sexual life was the avenue for elite white creole families to ensure their class privileges, which depended to a large extent on their demonstrated white status proven through the judicial process of *limpieza de sangre* or purity of blood (Stolcke 1989). Seclusion and overprotection ensured that young “marriageable” white women keep distance from having even slight close encounters with white men, and very particularly with black men. In fact, white women’s unions with men of color were extremely rare and prohibitive. Thus, interclass and racial marriage practices including inbreeding (arranging marriages among relatives), and interracial marriage legislation worked in favor white elites’ class interests to unite economic and prestige resources in a tightly knit circle of white wealthy families (Paquette 1988; Stolcke 1989).

The fact that there were considerably fewer white women compared to white men in Havana throughout the nineteenth century, informed the generalized perception among white men about the (sexual) inaccessibility of white women. In travel logs and literature throughout the nineteenth century, white men often lamented white women could hardly even be seen in public venues of the city (Martínez-Fernández 1995:27–50). In this context, the most common sexual partners of white men were free black and *mulata* women. In fact, they usually married with Spanish Whites or engaged in relationships with white creole men, although these were rarely formalized, given the legal and social prohibitions (Reid 2008).

Dance places were the most usual venues for these remaining disapproved but nonetheless tolerated interracial encounters between white men and women of color. While white women appeared as sexually inaccessible to men, quite the opposite was said about black, and particularly lighter skinned women, *mulatas*, who were often represented as sexually available to white men. Sentiments of fear and desire characterizing nineteenth century (white male) writing about racial mixing centered on the figure of *la mulata* constructed as a sexualized symbol of the whitening ideal and white male desire

(Kutzinski 1993). In reality, racial miscegenation was common and even acceptable within unions of women of color and white men of usually lower classes. Marrying a white man was a common strategy of social mobility for families of color under the premise of racial advancement or *blanqueamiento* (Stolcke 1989).

From a different perspective, mulatas epitomized white elites' own aspirations of population whitening. Creole intellectuals like José Antonio Saco and Antonio Bachiller y Morales in the 1830s and 1840s envisioned mulatas as casual sexual partners of white men and the mothers of progressively whiter offspring. As such, the bodies of mulatas offered a possible solution to the problem of how to incorporate Blacks into the project of the Cuban nation and simultaneously avoid a black revolution. Thus, mulatas embodied white creole elites' ambivalent attitudes toward racial miscegenation throughout the nineteenth century (Guevara 2005:105–28; Mena 2001). Considering that dancing was perhaps the most usual situation in which encounters between white men and mulatas occurred, dance became a key element of ongoing imperial and bourgeois narratives of anxiety projected onto discourses of endangerment of white domination (Mintz & Price 1976).

In addition to everyday interactions in the homes of white masters, women of color generally met with white men at so-called *cuna* dances hosted by elite free black families in Havana, at parish fairs during religious holidays with mixed class and race attendance, and at dance academies. In his account of Cuban history published in 1859, the Spanish educator José García de Arboleya offered a rather suggestive definition of *cuna* balls in relation to the interracial encounters that happened therein “*cuna* refers to the gathering of rude or immoral people in which whites, blacks, and mulattoes dance together” (García de Arboleya 1859:263). For their part, *escuelitas* or academies were held at private residences where white men paid to practice dance with women (both white and black) under the direction of a black or mulato dance instructor. Encounters between white men and black women at these and other dance venues were common, although they were not well seen among white elites. Often, white pupils of dance academies attended *cuna* balls of elite people of color secretly, and the dancing happened behind closed windows or concealed back rooms (González 1992; Villaverde 2010). For instance, in one of the scenes in the play by Ignacio Sarachaga “In the Kitchen” (“*En la Cocina*,” 1881), an upper-class *criollo* sneaks into a *baile de cuna* behind the back of his family and friends to keep up appearances (Sarachaga & Leal 1990). Evidently, dancing and attending dances with Blacks and mulatos/as affected the respectability not only of white women (as evidence below will show), but also, to a lesser extent, of elite white men.

The moral regulation of interracial dancing occurred particularly through *costumbrista* reviews in print periodicals, which served as channels of the anxieties and aspirations of middle- and upper-class white Cuban families. *Costumbrismo* was a vernacular literary and artistic genre that emerged during the nineteenth century. Costumbrista writers and artists became the spokespersons of Havana's bourgeoisie and through their works they promoted a broad-based program of moral and cultural reform. The regulation at the societal level that costumbristas epitomized influenced the implementation of legal measures of social control at the state level. As interracial dancing became a subject of concern following the growing popularity (especially among white elites) of African-influenced local rhythms, legal measures were put forth to regulate dancing. The archival records referred below show that at least since the 1840s, a state license was required to host a dance either at private residences (where academies operated) or at theaters like the Tacón or dance salons like Café Escauriza or La Lonja.

Black people in the cities in general but particularly mulatas were known to excel at popular dance rhythms, the contradanza, danza, and danzón. African musical traditions to European dance genres, particularly the French *contredanse*, influenced these genres characteristic rhythmic accent. Through the music and dance performances of black musicians these local rhythms became creolized versions of European dance music and grew increasingly popular among white creole elites. In press commentaries and satirical articles, white creole moralists extensively attacked the music and the movements accompanying them deemed lascivious and immoral. They criticized white families for taking part in them, especially white women who learned to dance from their mulata domestic servants or from men who learned from mulatas at dance academies (Mena 2005). For example, *costumbrista* writer Luis Victoriano Betancourt charged against parents for corrupting their daughters by teaching them to dance.

The scandal consists in that the mothers teach their daughters to dance before teaching them to use a needle; or the family duties ... it consists in that the man ... learns in disgusting houses the cynical movements of the dance and later teaches them to unwary young women, corrupting thereby the same women whom he will marry tomorrow, and of whom he will dare to demand fidelity.

BETANCOURT 1985:364

While depictions of white women convey they were somehow threatened by dance, in literature and travel logs, mulatas often appear represented in dance

settings and situations as menacing sexual temptations for white men (Lane 2010:11; Kutzinski 1993). For example, during the second half of the nineteenth century, there was a series of cigarette package covers entitled “Vida y Muerte de la Mulata” (Life and Death of the Mulata). The illustrations depicted mulatas and black women with shoulders and breasts exposed, in insinuating poses and situations with white (rich) men; several scenes in the series take place in dance venues (Kutzinski 1993). A major character in costumbrista writings and paintings, “La mulata de rumbo” represented such archetype: she is a light-skinned woman of color with an almost pathological fondness for dancing danzones who lives off of and squanders her white old rich lover’s gifts. Francisco de Paula Gelabert characterized her in a satirical article “La Mulata de Rumbo” (Gelabert 1985). The Spanish visitor in Havana at midcentury, Antonio de las Barras y Prado painted a similar picture of mulatas: “In general they are lazy and they only think of *posing* [*colocarse*] to enjoy diversions and luxury. They are spendthrifts and vain. Their fondness of dance reaches frenesí” (De las Barras y Prado 1925:115, emphasis in original).

Overall, nineteenth-century white writers created a stereotype of mulatas as moral antithesis of “decent” white women according to morally coded behaviors such as streetwalking, smoking, dancing, dress, and the racialized and classed spaces they occupied in the city (Egüez Guevara 2015). For instance, while carriage promenading was *the* site where elite white women demonstrated their class status, moral worth, and prestige, dancing was a critical site where their reputation was put to test. Not only what kind of music they danced (contradanzas, danzas, and danzones were considered indecent¹³), but how decently they danced was a demonstration of their greater or lesser “honesty” or moral worth (Betancourt 1985:363–70; Egüez Guevara 2015; González 1992).

In this context, the association between black women and prostitution was explicitly made very often through representations of women of color as concubines of white men. Concubinage in the nineteenth century was in fact a discourse of a presumed naturally deviant black female sexuality. For instance, in his account of prostitution in Cuba, Benjamín de Céspedes, a medical doctor writing in 1888, listed concubinage among the causes of prostitution, and defined it in these terms, “a great portion of the colored race that has sex

13 A sharp moral censor in the early nineteenth century, Buenaventura Pascual Ferrer, charged in reference to the titles and lyrics of some of the popular songs of these genres at 1801 “One only needs to hear all of those tunes and their lyrics to find in them the most clumsy obscenity and the most creative inventiveness to provoke the debauchery and prostitution, the passions that—if well governed would make the happiness of society” (quoted in Ferrer 1965:119).

promiscuously among each other or with white men, to the extent that ... it is very difficult to distinguish the concubine from the prostitute, that who cohabits with a single man or with many for monetary interest" (De Céspedes 1888:131). Earlier in the century, in the classic nineteenth-century novel *Cecilia Valdés*, Cecilia is the prototype of the "almost white," provocative and beautiful mulata, who falls in love with the son of rich slave trader, Leonardo Gamboa. Their first encounter happens, not surprisingly, at a cuna dance ball of elite people of color in Havana. Gamboa abandons Cecilia for a white woman of his same class. These kinds of unacceptable but nonetheless tolerated encounters between white men and women of color were commonplace at dance academies.

Official regulations to enforce gender and race segregation at dance settings came in response to denunciations of white elites in moralistic articles in the press as well as actual complaints directed to police authorities. Under a section labeled "Public performances" at the Government collection of the Cuban National Archives about 150 files dated between 1840 and 1868 contain license petitions, cancellations, and calls for regulation or suspension of dance parties, dance academies, and masked balls, the biggest of which were held at theaters.

In particular, a file dated from October 31, 1848 contains the ongoing discussions and resolution to allow the admission of "persons of only one sex and caste" at dance academies in Havana. The resolution echoed the complaints to neighborhood police by indignant Havana's residents about what they described as a "scandal" of racial mixing at dance academies. These narratives of protest show a markedly racialized concern for "decency" and respectability. In this file, the neighborhood police officer refers to the captain general the feelings of the offended residents,

The continuous disorders and scandals that exist in the dance academies, especially those situated in the street of Jesús María ... for being of colored people [*gente de color*] are the most indecorous ... appealing to Your Excellency to take precautionary measures respect to such abuses to the tranquility of the neighborhood and good morals of the people.¹⁴

Furthermore, several complaints clearly allude to women at the dances as morally and sexually suspect,

14 ANC Fondo de Gobierno Superior Civil Leg 997 No. 34490, 1848.

Such abuses ... are those in which diverse castes of women of not-very-decorous practices [*ejercicios*] are mixed, which corrupt the public morality perverting those innocent youth that, unfortunately, become habituated to frequenting the mentioned academies, false name, for ... teaching to dance is the least that their directors intend to do, except for the dance practiced in such places, which is the dance named “Brave Law” [*Ley Brava*] ... which is very indecorous.¹⁵

A theme in these complaints is the idea that the directors of the dance academies were “hiring” women to dance with male attendants, who presumed to be apprentices, but nonetheless were actually very experienced dancers who paid a peso for each dance with the women. In this context, the sole possibility of a gathering involving women of different “races” with other men (assumed to be young and white) was the motive of concern for residents and authorities as it opened up the possibility of miscegenation:

In fact, the women are of different sects [*sectas*] since there are white and mulatas, some of the former of not very good morals ... the neighborhood considers prejudicial the establishment of such academies [*escuelitas*], not only for the scandals that cause the reunion of different classes, but also because often the dance lasts all night long which can be inferred of how they can behave when the majority of people are of few principles.¹⁶

As part of their efforts to regulate and formalize dance instruction, in 1851 authorities renamed the academies from “*escuelitas de baile*” to the more formal “*academias de baile*” and continued to incorporate new regulations in subsequent decades.

During the second half of the century, the reputation of dance academies only worsened to the point where academies and theaters where public dance balls were hosted were persistently referred to as fronts for hiding prostitution or “preludes to the whorehouses” (Lapique 2011; Moreno 1887). The moral panic about dance came to a peak alongside heated public controversies over prostitution during the late 1870s and onto the late 1880s against the backdrop of nationalist fights during and after the war years. For example, in the Cuban National Archive Government collection a series of reports from inspectors of several districts in Havana dated from June 20, 1871 through December 31, 1881.

15 ANC Fondo de Gobierno Superior Civil Leg 997 No. 34490, 1848.

16 ANC Fondo de Gobierno Superior Civil Leg 997 No. 34490, 1848.

In the reports, inspectors discuss at length the problem of interracial interactions at dance academies, in spite of the fact that, as they reiterate, its prohibition had been clearly stated in an earlier (1851) version of dance regulations. The inspectors reported that “in almost all the academies, the female dance partners are of the class of *pardos* and this is absolutely against the precepts of our laws, which try to prevent the mixture of races.”¹⁷ These women “do not have morality, but mostly vices and bad customs, which they inherited from their mothers due to the [low] life that they are involved in.”¹⁸ Listed in the file are the addresses in Havana of at least eight academies where such infractions were uncovered. Inspectors complained that the number of academies exceed the number of inspectors, which made it easy for dancers to circumvent police surveillance, “Its demoralization is inevitable in spite of the surveillance of the inspectors and other police employees, because they cannot dedicate exclusively to control two, three or more academies simultaneously.”¹⁹ The document includes a copy of a Draft of the Ruling Statutes for Directors of Dance Academies, listing eight statements and conditions for the operation of dance academies. These include the prohibition of interracial dancing (#4), that the women in attendance as practice partners meet “the conditions advised by the laws of prudery” (#6), that the police is directly responsible for making these regulations effective and that negligence will be punished with suspension of employment.²⁰ These narratives reveal how dance was a set of codes that state authorities used to discuss and channel white society and state anxieties about sexual and racial relations in a politically tense moment of Cuba’s colonial history.

Dancing was by this time, like prostitution, also used as a metaphor or set of codes to convey an urban sensory and social disorder. The updated ruling statutes also revised the kinds and number of instruments to perform the music for dancing at the academies held at residences every day of the week. The piano with no further accompaniment would ensure making “the least possible noise until the sessions finish at 11 o’clock at night.”²¹ The author of a column in the newspaper *La correspondencia de Cuba*, protesting dance academies in 1880, described the bourgeois imaginary in terms of the sensory order that should govern in the city under the “laws of morality,”

17 ANC, Fondo Gobierno General Leg 352, No. 16917, 1871.

18 ANC, Fondo Gobierno General Leg 352, No. 16917, 1871.

19 ANC, Fondo Gobierno General Leg 352, No. 16917, 1871.

20 ANC, Fondo Gobierno General Leg 352, No. 16917, 1871.

21 ANC, Fondo Gobierno General Leg 352, No. 16917, 1871.

The pen resists itself to describe the scandals occurring every day in those foci of dishonor [the dance academies] ... to the sight of everybody, of the police officers first, of the pacific pedestrians later, who imagine living in a city where morality is respected and where prudery is a current and not derogated law, [they] transit through the public streets without suspecting that around the corner they will find scenes that for sure are not known in any other country. This is a disease that we are denouncing ... [which manifests at that level] of ulceration [in no other city like in this one] challenging the strongest stomachs.²²

The idea that dancing was done “to the sight of everybody,” so frequent in narratives about dance at this time, suggests that there was something about the “publicness” of dance that was unacceptable, the same “publicness” that inspired bourgeois disgusted sentiments and subsequent official prostitution regulations. Scholars of prostitution in Cuba have observed that urban and social reform projects at midcentury were guided by mechanisms of mapping morality (McCabe 2003; Sippial 2013). Policies to regulate prostitution, idleness, small businesses, or cabildos of Africans and their celebrations between the 1830s and 1860s in Cuba sought to manage and distribute the actions, behaviors, and bodies of marginalized subjects by morally coding them as acceptable or unacceptable within city limits. These policies often involved the relocation of these morally tainted subjects to extramural areas of the city. Not surprisingly, the residences where dance academies were hosted were located at similar extramural marginal neighborhoods of San Isidro, Jesus María, or Barrio de Colón where the majority of houses of prostitution operated (Barcia 2009).

Taking this notion to a sensory plane, elites persistently called for the management of morality in visual and auditory planes of respectability in the city landscape (as in seeing “indecent” bodies, behaviors or hearing “infernal” African drums in during cabildo celebrations). For instance, the overarching principle underlying prostitution edicts and bourgeois narratives by the 1870s was that the presence of prostitutes in localized city venues was acceptable as long as they were effectively covered up or “hidden,” either behind covered carriages, inside houses, behind close windows or simply “dressed up decently” (De Céspedes 1888:151; also Anonymous 1894). Prudish creole writers spoke with very similar language about dance as a “scandalous” and disgusting visual spectacle and the need to hide it from the sight of foreigners as well as of

22 ANC, Fondo Gobierno General Leg 352, No. 16917, 1871.

respectable residents. In fact “scandalous behavior” was a common reason for conviction and penalization of prostitutes throughout the nineteenth century (McCabe 2003).

The archival record introducing this section offers a nice illustration of the discursive uses and somewhat contradictory meanings of the notion of “publicness,” which serve as a byway to the discussion about intimate spaces in the next section. In his original report dated December 25, 1848, the neighborhood captain offered an additional antecedent that further backed his decision to revoke the license for the dance at the house of Don Ramon Cabral.

In addition, I must let Your Excellency know that last month in a party at the house of the mentioned Cabral, there was the scandal about the dance not only of *pardas* with white men but also a brother of the house maid [*criada*] of Cabral danced publicly in such dance.²³

The word “public” in this quote is charged with the combined racial and sexual anxieties that characterized narratives about dance in the nineteenth century. The specific usage does not necessarily convey the spatial component of the action (dancing) as this was a family gathering held inside the home of Cabral. Rather, the word “public” is used to describe the manner of dancing and its evaluation by the established racial, gender, and sexual standards regarding a specific kind of relationship of *proximity*.

Dance and Intimacies

I have argued that dance in the Cuban colonial context was a tool of imperial control as well as a practice of resistance. Furthermore, dance venues were coded as spaces of danger to colonial elites peculiarly concerned with maintaining sex, race, and class hierarchies. In this context of surveillance, colonial subjects used dance venues strategically to mask subversive activities against white colonial rule, as well as to navigate through strict gender, racial, and sexual structures imposed by white colonial hegemony. Masking as a political tactic of resistance used by colonial subjects was taken one step further at masked balls. The following examples drawn from criminal records for masked balls offer a window into the dynamics of governance and resistance at play at these instances.

²³ ANC, Fondo de Gobierno Superior Civil, Leg 997 No. 34487, 1848.

In March 1851, the neighborhood captain of the Colón neighborhood in Havana reported the following incident:

[Hereby I] let Your Excellency know of the abusive disorder noted at the masked ball nights authorized at the Theaters [of the neighborhood] and Café de Escauriza for the unlimited attendance of blacks and mulattoes of the worst conditions and reputations [*mal notados*] ... forming big reunions of the *criollos curros* singing in their ways and costumes and remaining all night long, as if these diversions had been granted to them ... as people of color they shouldn't be transiting the streets after eleven at night ... with such disorder [and] getting drunk ... [the situation reached such extreme that I] caught Blacks disguised as women, black women, and even mulattoes, who pretended to be equal under the disguise [*aparentando bajo el disfraz ser igual*] have taken pernicious liberties with the [white] ladies [*señoras*], placing the tranquility of the dance at risk ... [Myself, the Officer] aided by [my] subordinates have tried to avoid this without success, because it would have been necessary to capture a great number of individuals.²⁴

In response, ten days later the Captain General resolved the following as solutions. First, to impose a fine of ten pesos to be paid by the owners of the locales, for each person of color entering the masked balls offered at the dance salons of the Tacón Theater, Circo Habanero, and the Escauriza Café. And second, to avoid the fine, employees at the ticket booth must take the precaution to verify the skin color of the hands and arms of those entering in disguise to the theater.²⁵

The three locations mentioned in the document were most frequented by Havana's white creole elites, the most prestigious being the Tacón theater, followed by the Café Escauriza and the Circo Habanero (later known as "Teatro Villanueva"). In his travel chronicles published in 1871, Samuel Hazard, a North American visitor in Havana, highlighted the contrasts in social status between the masked balls at the Tacón and the Escauriza. He spoke highly of his experience at the "more select affairs" at the Tacón, where he found "a better class of people," a "splendid" ball room, and the favorite music, the *danzas* danced by costumed attendees "to some degree of propriety." By contrast at the Escauriza, the same *danzas* were a "most indecent spectacle" where diversity of costumes

24 ANC, Fondo de Gobierno Superior Civil, Leg. 998 No. 34540, 1851.

25 ANC, Fondo de Gobierno Superior Civil, Leg. 998 No. 34540, 1851.

concealed the equally immoral attendees “rich and poor, high and low,” and among the latter, all classes of prostitutes (Hazard 1871:197).

However, Blacks were not allowed at the white society balls that Hazard describes here. Colonial authorities granted licenses for either all white or all black balls, either masked (which happened during carnival), or out of season. Therefore, the Officer's charges in the cited record file refer to the habitual street congregations during carnival season of “people of all ages sexes and colors” as a Hazard noted, “mixed up together ... in inextricable confusion,” particularly in the surroundings of dance salons and theaters (Hazard 1871:517). A writer of the local magazine *El Moro Muza* offers a picture of street carnival in Havana in 1860, where there was “noise, hubbub, clamor and shining [rumbantela] ... stands selling meat and drink, public dances in theaters, coaches loaded with ladies and servants, acrobats preceded by a band of amateur musicians, rascals picking fights, gangs of misbehaving kids ‘of all classes and colors’ and ‘a thousand *comparsas* that fill the streets’” (quoted in Chasteen 2004:85).

It is likely that the people of color in disguise mentioned in the cited criminal record file participated in black carnival *comparsas*, which were street performances of dancers carrying flowered arches and holding the edge of colored ribbons.²⁶ In his history of music in Cuba, Alejo Carpentier noted that street *comparsas* danced and also sang to a distinctive style of music known as *cocoyé*, “a musical invention of French Blacks interpreted by Cuban Blacks” (Carpentier 2001:149, 150; Mena 2005:140). In his detailed study of carnival in nineteenth-century Havana, John Chasteen noted that *comparsas* received little press coverage, however *comparsa* members show up occasionally in police reports because of “scuffles or disorderly drunkenness” (Chasteen 2004:85). Furthermore, historian Luz Mena observed that masked balls for free Blacks had “a reputation for getting rowdy” (Mena 2001:463).

Rowdiness and flamboyance were common characterizations of a different class of free black people in nineteenth-century Havana known as *negros curros*, who appear to be the protagonists of the incidents described in the above-cited criminal record file. The *negros curros* were black immigrants from Spain

26 According to Chasteen (2004: 76), at midcentury in Havana *comparsas* practiced weeks before carnival in what were known as “candle dances,” dancing to the *cinquillo* rhythm characteristic of African-influenced *danzón*. In the panicked debates about dance that marked public opinion since mid-century and onto the 1870s, moralists attacked the *danzones* danced at these parties for considering them “African ... ardent and provocative” (Otto in <http://www.habanaelegante.com/Winter98/Ronda.htm>; last accessed January 30, 2016; see also Lane 2007).

known and feared as criminals and pimps. Culturally speaking, they stood at the opposite end from the class of educated and Europeanized free Blacks in Havana. While the latter emulated bourgeois lifestyle, manners, and social practices, the *negros curros* had their distinctive style of dress, using abundant accessories and jewelry, a particular hair style, their own way of speaking and “swagger” walk.²⁷ Beginning in 1834, Captain Miguel de Tacón subjected the class of *negros curros* along with “vagrants” and prostitutes to systematic persecution and criminalization as part of his efforts of moral mapping, social cleansing, and modernization of public spaces in Havana.

Interestingly, at the 1851 incident in the Colón neighborhood, the strikingly distinctive, fashionably dressed *curros* were easily spotted by government authorities even *behind* a disguise, and even one of the “opposite” gender. The officer notes that the black men cross-dressed as women “to pass,” or as described by the officer, to pretend to “be equal” and get physically proximate to white women by taking unacceptable “liberties with the white ladies.” Furthermore, regarding the measures imposed, it appears that the disguises not only allowed Blacks to transgress boundaries of gender and race, but also to outwit legal barriers, since they appear to have been entering white society masked balls at prestigious theaters. Thus, in accordance with what is stated in this file, it was a habitual practice to ask attendees in costumes to remove their mask for verification of (racial) identity upon entering the balls.²⁸

Moreover, the case described is an example of a seemingly rare and most politically uncomfortable “contact zone” or instance of proximity between colonial subjects in Havana’s slave society: the close encounter between a black man and a white woman. In the context of the heteronormative and sexually predisposing atmosphere of dancing, these kinds of interracial proximities offered the conditions for a particularly unacceptable kind of cross-racial-gender intimacy. In fact, the directionality or orientation (Ahmed 2006) of desire of black and mulatto men toward white women (and vice-versa) in the context of Havana society was unattainable by the extent of colonial laws and white bourgeois and imperial imaginaries (Stolcke 1989). In nineteenth-century Cuba, black male-white female relationships were beyond prohibitive: they were unthinkable. I use the expression “unthinkable” in the spirit of

27 Sublette 2004: 104; the original source on *negros curros* is Ortiz 1986.

28 Chasteen 2004; <http://www.habanaelegante.com/Winter98/Ronda.htm> (last accessed January 30, 2016). Luz Mena (2001:463) discussed a criminal record case around 1840 where three white men were arrested after attending a black masked ball dressed as Blacks. The men went dressed as black females “and danced suggestively and enthusiastically with the black and mulatto women at the ball.”

Michael Ralph Trouillot's classic essay "An Unthinkable History: The Haitian Revolution as a Non Event." Trouillot defines unthinkable as "that which one cannot conceive within the range of possible alternatives" or which challenges the accepted frame of thought of its time (Trouillot 1995:82). In this case, romantic or sexual relations between white women and black men challenged the conventions expected of white women, that is class and race endogamous heterosexual relationships (Stolcke 1989). Thus, the direction or orientation of desire from a white woman toward a black man was considered taboo and thus silenced from dominant historical narratives and imaginaries.²⁹ On the other hand, as I examined in the previous section, white male desire for mulatas was somewhat fetishized in the bourgeois imagination, although with undertones of disgust, fear, and desire. Thus, as with all matters pertaining to white women's respectability it is likely that white creole writers had an interest in silencing—at least in written narratives—those relationships (or the instances of encounter that may lead to them) that fell outside of their aspired race/class-endogamous sexual regime.

For this reason, representations at street carnivals and crowded spaces of white "families" in general, and white women in particular, were inserted into the generalized anxiety and moral panic about dance, prostitution, and interracial sex that characterized white bourgeois narratives (and informed colonial regulations) in the nineteenth century (Bakhtin 1984; McClintock 1995). For instance, Chasteen commented on an illustration from the magazine *El Moro Muza* in 1864 (Figure 1) where a coach of "decent" people stood out in the midst of "a disrespectful crowd of maskers tussling in the streets. Very few women can be discerned in the crowd and the most obvious one is a prostitute" (Chasteen 2004:85; *El Moro Muza* 1864:157).

Thus, from the perspective of the white colonial gaze, those "*señoras*" mentioned in the 1851 criminal report, being approached by grotesque and drunken masked Blacks in the midst of a dangerous carnival mob, were in a rather precarious and morally-sexually endangering situation, which expectedly mobilized quick (re)actions on the part of colonial authorities.³⁰

29 Ahmed 2006; Victor Fowler, personal communication, October 7, 2014.

30 In Cuba, other instances of anxiety about white women in crowds were at parish fairs, where the predominantly feminine space of the church "spilled over into the streets" where they were exceptionally allowed to walk through the streets (Martínez-Fernández 1995:27–50). Moreover, in her classic work *Imperial leather*, Anne McClintock observed similar racialized, classed, and gendered constructs of crowds in the context of British imperialism. She noted that urban crowds were associated with fears of social unrest

FIGURE 1 *"Habana-Carnaval de 1864"*
EL MORO MUZA, FEBRUARY 14, 1864, P. 157

In the "permissive" atmosphere of carnival where classes were "confused," music was loud, men and women mixed, and disguises covering identities only magnified white bourgeois and imperial anxieties (Bakhtin 1984; Kingman 2006). A creole medical doctor in the late nineteenth century illustrated this when he lamented in reference to a public dance at the Tacón Theater,

One must mistrust the destiny of a people that allows the sad confusion of the civilized and cultured race of the country with strange and uncultured elements that in the end triumph in their savage vices and customs, introducing them like a virus in the social organism either in the form of popular entertainment, or in their rebel instincts.

DE CÉSPEDES 1888:144

In many ways, dance and carnival offered a space to more easily transgress and negotiate physical proximities across social boundaries, as the classic moral censor of the early nineteenth century Buenaventura Pascual Ferrer described

among the poor, criminals, and the insane, women—particularly prostitutes and alcoholics—, children and "primitive" subjects.

so aptly about a dance party in Havana, “Taking advantage of the musical background, of the festive atmosphere that facilitated the affair [the attendees] took such audacities and liberties that in another circumstance, they would not have” (*El Regañón*, October 28, 1800, quoted in Ferrer 1965:62).

As per the anxious narratives and silences that surrounded them, these instances of (intimate) proximity might have been exceptional and influenced by the festive atmosphere of dancing and of carnival. This is hardly arguable considering how ubiquitous dancing was in Havana society during the nineteenth century. Carnival season started in February and lasted several weeks, through Lent. Dancing (masked or not) was an everyday activity and so were the opportunities for cross-racial, gender, and class encounters. However, dancing was only one of several of such instances of colonial contact. Religious gatherings at parish fairs, plazas, and churches also provided opportunities for otherwise inadmissible proximity, particularly between men and white upper-class women.

A fascinating but rare narrative about cross-racial intimacies at everyday venues is the often-silenced story about white women's proximity to her black male domestic servants. For instance, wealthy women went to church accompanied by their black male servants “who carried pieces of carpet and folded chairs for their mistresses’ comfort and convenience” (Martínez-Fernández 1995:27–50; Guijarro 1876). Similarly, white women were routinely in close contact with their coach drivers, who were generally black domestic slaves, during their everyday rides shopping or promenading through Havana's venues (García & Gullón Abao 1997:135–57). In a late century article, a creole writer confesses his uneasiness with the situation of intimate bodily closeness created inside the *volanta* (horse drawn carriage) by the most dangerous encounter between a man of color, the coach driver or *calesero* and the “lady” of Havana, so fetishized by white men for being extremely inaccessible,

It was censorable—as it now still seems to me, when I see the scene reproduced—seeing how skins, and how the humble lad hurried, introducing his head and body inside the carriage, demanding orders. I haven't been able but to protest about this custom. For the employee, it is denigrating [poor them ...! For the ladies it is, I don't know, it's ... awful. How could it be allowed to let a stranger inside the home, by traditional custom? Because, the interior of a family carriage is like an intimate *budoir*.³¹

31 Hernández Miyares in <http://www.habanaelegante.com/Summer98/Ronda.htm> (last accessed January 30, 2016).

This quotation evidences the discrepancy in racialized perceptions of “deserving” male subjects of white female desire. While the proximity between the black *calesero* and her white female customer makes Hernández anxious, a North American traveler “pities the [white] Cuban young man who is in love” because his physical proximity to white women is censored and extremely policed (Williams 1881 quoted in Pérez 1992:240). Furthermore, Hernández later remark places the idea of bourgeois domesticity under a different light as it suggests that domesticity is carried over and along with the woman’s body onto her *volanta* to produce a *sui generis* mobile extension of the bourgeois home in the streets of Havana. As such, this mobile carrier of the bourgeois “lady” becomes a space that is as “intimate” (and sexualized) as her own dormitory.

These were the kinds of proximities with which colonizers and colonized cohabitated in shared spaces for almost four centuries. However, since the early nineteenth century they became the source of pressing white bourgeois anxieties and imperial control. Thus, narratives of anxiety about physical proximity in public settings only served as a cover for the tolerated institutionalized intimacies that slavery produced in the domestic realm, such as the nursing of infants or sexual relations between masters and slaves (Mintz & Price 1976). The rather permeable boundaries of Havana’s everyday life in a slave society exposed the inherent contradictions of colonial rule and its attempts to create and police boundaries in the social fabric and through space. The examples above have shown that policing boundaries of race, sex, and gender in dance settings was more than often a failed technology of colonial rule.

Conclusion

I have discussed colonial intimacies, contact zones, and the governance of dance and sexuality based on evidence from government records and other primary and secondary sources to either allow or forbid particular types of dance gatherings (mixed dance academies, dance gatherings of plantation slaves), or to impose disciplining measures to transgressors of existing statutes in the context of masked balls and street carnival. Considering that the evidence shows that at instances of dance, masking and interracial sex, were two equally powerful anxiety-generating elements for ruling classes. These two elements represented a potential threat to empire and white hegemony because they affected their capacity to classify and control individuals, therefore creating a crisis of representation (McClintock 1995). The incident at the street carnival in 1851 Havana illustrates the impotence of colonial authority to respond to a seem-

ingly uncontrollable mob of masqueraders transgressing the order on many levels. The combination of masking and the looming possibility of interracial sex at this dangerous instance of interracial encounter created a moral panic that paralyzed colonial authority.

Moreover, the examples discussed show that masking and dancing were used as strategies of “passing.” In Cuban colonial society, passing was an everyday tactic of survival resistance to the social and legal limitations imposed on colonized subjects in slave society. For people of color, passing was a survival tactic in the face of the colonial order’s compulsion to mimic whiteness. *Mulatos* and *mulatas* passed as white, slaves passed as free, and even Whites were compelled to continuously emphasize and perform whiteness through cultural practices of distinction, and even by wearing their own “masks”—fashionable dresses, and among the women, abundant layers of white facial powder (Hazard 1871). The driving force behind these practices among the white bourgeoisie was the ideology of respectability (also deemed “urbanity”). Respectability demanded an often-ridiculous insistence to keep appearances and conform to strict molds of conduct by white European standards. In a context of the socially institutionalized simulacra of whiteness, moral panics over dance, interracial sex, and prostitution were no more than covers of white bourgeois double standards. The pressing and repetitive narratives of anxiety and the legislation that they drove became the ruling-elites’ own strategies to “mask” their active involvement and partaking in these “scandalous” practices. Each of them—(Afro-Cuban) dancing, interracial sex, and prostitution—were seen as inevitable and necessary evils (as was slavery itself), and crucial elements for the survival and preservation of white hegemony and the colonial order.

In fact, although wearing disguises and cross-dressing were forbidden actions in the government edicts (*bandos*), they were “tolerated” during carnival. Dancing had to be allowed to secure the “health” and stability of the plantation system. Interracial sex was the inevitable avenue to incorporate slave population into the nation without risking colonial rule through the potential ousting led by insurgent Blacks.

Ruling classes actively took part in these forbidden spaces. White creoles danced with “indecent” black women and dangerous *mulatas* surreptitiously at lower-class balls of Blacks. They also maintained clandestine romantic and sexual relationships with them and probably also used the services of prostitutes. While waging a war against them for decades in the name of decency, white creoles also danced “indecent” and “scandalous” African influenced dances like *danzón*, succumbing to its “irresistible” drives to the point of embracing *danzón* as a national dance by the end of the century (Iglesias Utset 2003).

Through these inevitable cultural transgressions and appropriations, white creoles developed their own project of cultural identity, which played an important role in the political processes of Cuban independence and national subject making that flared up in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Finally, I examined practices of “masking to pass” as tactics of resistance and negotiation of boundaries to arbitrary racial and gender (sexual) matrixes in nineteenth-century Cuban society. In doing so, I exposed the discursive silences created by ruling elites around relations and zones of contact between black men and white women. This analysis may inspire further discussions about the role of moral governance and colonial control in zones of contact and their role in the construction and preservation of normative regimes of sexual and affective orientation in the colonial context and beyond.

Bibliography

- Anonymous, 1894. *Reglamento para el Régimen de la Prostitución en la Ciudad de la Habana*. Havana: Imprenta El Pueblo.
- Abreu García, Leidy, 2008. Matrimonio interracial: Legislación, familia y disenso en La Habana colonial (1776–1881). *Perfiles De La Cultura Cubana*, Enero-Abril [http://www.perfiles.cult.cu/article.php?article_id=257.]
- Ahmed, Sarah, 2006. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham NC: Duke University Press.
- Baerga, Maria del Carmen. 2015. *Negociaciones de sangre: Dinámicas racializantes en el Puerto Rico decimonónico*. Madrid: Iberoamericana.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail, 1984. *Rabelais and His World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Barcia, María del Carmen, 2009. *Los ilustres apellidos: Negros en La Habana colonial*. Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales.
- Behar, Ruth & Deborah Gordon, 1995. *Women Writing Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Betancourt, Luis Victoriano, 1985. El Baile. In Salvador Bueno (ed.), *Costumbristas Cubanos del siglo XIX*. Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, pp. 363–70.
- Bliss, Katherine Elaine, 2001. *Compromised Positions: Prostitution, Public Health, and Gender Politics in Revolutionary Mexico City*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Briggs, Laura, 2002. *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Burton, Antoinette, 2003. *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cabrera, Lydia, 1979. *Reglas de Congo-Palo Monte Mayombero*. Miami: Peninsular Books.

- Carpentier, Alejo, 2001. *Music in Cuba*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Chapeaux, Pedro Deschamps & Juan Pérez de la Riva, 1974. *Contribución a la historia de la gente sin historia*. Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales.
- Chasteen, John Charles, 2004. *National Rhythms, African Roots: The Deep History of Latin American Popular Dance*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Childs, Matt, 2006. *The 1812 Aponte Rebellion in Cuba and the Struggle Against Atlantic Slavery*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- De Céspedes, Benjamín, 1888. *La prostitución en la ciudad de La Habana*. Havana: Establecimiento Tipográfico O'Reilly.
- De Las Barras y Prado, Antonio, 1925. *La Habana a mediados del siglo XIX: Memorias de Antonio De Las Barras y Prado*. Madrid: Imprenta de la Ciudad Lineal.
- Egüez Guevara, Pilar, 2015. Colonial Imaginaries of Cuban Women: The Politics of Place, Performance and Urban Representation in Nineteenth Century Havana. *Jenda: A Journal of Culture and African Women Studies* 22:36–65.
- El Moro Muza, 1864. *Habana-Carnaval de 1864*. Havana: Imprenta El Iris.
- Ferrer, Buenaventura Pascual, 1965. *El Regaño y el nuevo regaño*. Havana: Empresa Consolidada de Artes Gráficas.
- Finch, Aisha, 2015. *Rethinking Slave Rebellion in Cuba: La Escalera and the Insurgencias of 1841–1844*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Findlay, Eileen, 1999. *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870–1920*. Durham NC: Duke University Press.
- Foucault, Michel, 1978. *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Know*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- García De Arboleya, José, 1859. *Manual de la Isla de Cuba: Compendio de su historia, geografía, estadística y administración*. Havana: Imprenta del Tiempo.
- García, Juan Andreo & Alberto José Gullón Abao, 1997. Vida y muerte de la mulata. *Crónica Ilustrada de la Prostitución en al Cuba Del XIX: Anuario De Estudios Americanos* 54(1):135–57.
- Gelabert, Francisco de Paula, 1985. La Mulata de Rumbo. In Salvador Bueno (ed.), *Costumbristas cubanos del siglo XIX*. Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, pp. 435–42.
- Gonzalez, Reinaldo, 1992. *Contradanzas y latigazos*. Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas.
- Guevara, Gema, 2005. Inexacting Whiteness: Blanqueamiento as a Gender-Specific Trope in the Nineteenth Century. *Cuban Studies* 36(1):105–28.
- Guijarro, Miguel, 1876. *Las mujeres españolas portuguesas y americanas*. Vol. 1. Madrid: Miguel Guijarro.
- Guy, Donna J., 2000. *White Slavery and Mothers Alive and Dead: The Troubled Meeting of Sex, Gender, Public Health, and Progress in Latin America*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Hazard, Samuel, 1871. *Cuba with Pen and Pencil*. Hartford CT: Hartford Publishing Company.

- Iglesias Utset, Marial, 2003. *Las metáforas del cambio en la vida cotidiana: Cuba 1898–1902*. Havana: Ediciones Unión.
- Hernandez Miyares, Enrique, 1916. *Obras completas de Enrique Hernández Miyares. Vol. II. Prosas*. Havana: Imprenta Avisador Comercial.
- Kingman, Eduardo, 2006. *La ciudad y los otros, Quito 1860–1940: Higienismo, ornato y policía*. Quito: FLACSO Ecuador.
- Kutzinski, Vera, 1993. *Sugar's Secrets: Race and the Erotics of Cuban Nationalism*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.
- Lane, Jill, 2007. Black/face Publics: The Social Bodies of Fraternidad. In Janelle Reinelt & Joseph Roach (eds.), *Critical Theory and Performance: Revised and Enlarged Edition*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, pp. 141–55.
- Lane, Jill, 2010. Smoking Habaneras, Or a Cuban Struggle with Racial Demons. *Social Text* 28(3):11–37.
- Lapique Becali, Zoila, 1979. *Música colonial cubana en las publicaciones periódicas (1812–1902)*. La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas.
- Loomba, Ania, 2005. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. London: Routledge.
- Martínez-Fernández, Luis, 1995. Life in a “Male City”: Native and Foreign Elite Women in Nineteenth-Century Havana. *Cuban Studies* 25:27–50.
- McCabe, Marikay, 2003. Parameters of the Public: Commercial and Legal Topographies of 19th Century Havana, Cuba. Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, New York.
- McClintock, Anne, 1995. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. New York: Routledge.
- Mena, Luz, 2001. “No Common Folk”: Free Blacks and Race Relations in the Early Modernization of Havana (1830s–1840s). Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley.
- Mena, Luz, 2005. The Spaces and Faces of Music and Dance in Early Modern Havana. In Timothy Reiss (ed.), *Music, Writing and Cultural Unity in the Caribbean*. Trenton NJ: Africa World Press, pp. 129–48.
- Mintz, Sidney & Richard Price, 1976. *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Montalvo, Mercedes Santa Cruz y, 2008. *Viaje a La Habana*. Edited by Adriana Méndez Rodenas. Doral FL: Stockcero.
- Moreno, Francisco, 1887. *Cuba y su gente: Apuntes para la historia*. Madrid: Establecimiento Tipográfico de Enrique Teodoro.
- Ortiz, Fernando, 1986. *Los Negros Curros*. Edited by Diana Iznaga. Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales.
- Paquette, Robert, 1988. *Sugar is Made with Blood: The Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict between Empires Over Slavery in Cuba*. Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press.

- Pérez, Louis, 1992. *Slaves, Sugar, and Colonial Society: Travel Accounts of Cuba, 1801–1899*. Wilmington DE: Scholarly Resources.
- Pichardo, Esteban, 1836. *Diccionario provincial de voces cubanas*. Matanzas: Imprenta de la Real Marina.
- Pratt, Mary Louise, 2007. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge.
- Quintero Rivera, Angel, 2009. *Cuerpo y cultura: Las músicas mulatas y la subversión del baile*. Madrid: Iberoamericana.
- Reid, Michelle, 2008. Conspiracy, Race, and Gender: Free Women of Color in Nineteenth-Century Cuba. Paper presented at the Association for the Study of African American Life & History, October 1–5, Birmingham AL.
- Riño San Marful, Pablo, 2002. *Gallos y toros en Cuba*. Havana: Fundación Fernando Ortíz.
- Sarachaga, Ignacio & Rine Leal, 1990. *Teatro*. Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas.
- Sippial, Tiffany, 2013. *Prostitution, Modernity, and the Making of the Cuban Republic, 1840–1920*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Stallybrass, Peter & Allon White, 1986. *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. London: Methuen.
- Stolcke, Verena, 1989. *Marriage, Class, and Colour in Nineteenth-Century Cuba: A Study of Racial Attitudes and Sexual Values in a Slave Society*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Stoler, Ann, 2001. Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post)Colonial Studies. *Journal of American History* 88(3):829–65.
- Stoler, Ann (ed.), 2006. *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*. Durham NC: Duke University Press.
- Sublette, Ned, 2004. *Cuba and its Music: From the First Drums to the Mambo*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press.
- Trouillot, Michael Ralph, 1995. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Valdés, Geronimo (ed.), 1842. *Bando de gobernación y policía de la Isla de Cuba*. Havana: Imprenta del Gobierno y Capitanía General.
- Venegas, Carlos, 1990. *La urbanización de las murallas: Dependencia y modernidad*. Havana: Letras Cubanas.
- Villaverde, Cirilo, 2010. *Cecilia Valdés*. Barcelona: Linkgua Ediciones. [Orig. 1839.]