

Ethnicity and Cuban Revolutionary Ideology in Sara Gómez's *De cierta manera*

RAFAEL OCASIO, AGNES SCOTT COLLEGE

...el cine, para nosotros, será inevitablemente parcial, estará determinado por una toma de conciencia, será el resultado de una definida actitud frente a los problemas que se nos plantean, frente a la necesidad de descolonizarnos política e ideológicamente y de romper con los valores tradicionales ya sean económicos, étnicos o estéticos.

Sara Gómez, Lezcano 11

The Cuban revolutionary government's exploration of popular black religious practices is evident in the visual media (television and photography) immediately after the triumph of the Revolution on January 1, 1959. One notable example is the collage of images of a triumphant Fidel Castro as he symbolically took over Havana on January 8 in a military procession witnessed by the whole country, since the revolutionary government confiscated all of the national television stations from private hands.¹

For Castro, his arrival in Havana became a challenge in public relations, an opportunity to create a persona that would set the tone for his revolutionary government. Tad Szulc, correspondent for *The New York Times*, witnessed Castro's entrance into the glitzy capital city. The parade displayed iconographical elements, which Szulc interpreted as part of a calculated media event in which popular religious symbolism played a central role:

¹ As a guerrilla fighter, Castro had recognized the power of the media. One should remember Castro's 1957 underground interviews from his hideaway rebel camp with *The New York Times* reporter Herbert Matthews. The photographs of their encounter provided Castro, a young, handsome, and charismatic outlaw, the impetus necessary to continue a warfare that, until that point, most Cubans had considered a lost cause.

The advance to Havana lasted five days and nights, with Fidel, surrounded by his barbudos, riding atop a tank or in a jeep, receiving wild acclaim from the population, every step of the way relayed to the rest of the island by live television. His telescopic-sight semiautomatic rifle (now an American M-2) slung over his shoulder and his horn-trimmed spectacles perched over his Roman nose, Castro presented the image of the warrior-philosopher king. The famous beard, the cigar clenched in his teeth, and the olive-green combat figures (with a small medallion of the Virgin of Cobre on a chain around his neck conveniently visible under his open-collar shirt) were the symbols of the Fidel Castro personality, precisely the way he intended to be seen and remembered forever. (465)

If, indeed, Castro's bearded rebel army officers—los barbudos—were intended to visually suggest Christ's apostles, therefore making Castro a modern Christ figure, there was also significant exploitation of other native, popular religious images. Two meaningful, culturally-bound objects of religious nature must have stood out in Castro's photographs: the medallion of *la Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre* and his cigar.² Castro's display of Our Lady of *la Caridad del Cobre*, the national patron saint of Cuba, was a two-folded attempt to appeal to believers. It highlighted Castro as a practicing Catholic or, at least, as a supporter of the most popular Cuban hagiographic belief.

Further association with native religious belief systems is evident in Castro's cigar: a key element in Afro-Cuban rituals, in which the smoke is part of multiple offerings. It is within this religious context that Castro's cigar supported his allegiance to black religious belief systems, since *Nuestra Señora de la Caridad del Cobre* is also an

² The cult of Caridad del Cobre has strong links with the ethnic origins of Cubanness: the mulatta Madonna is thought to have saved from a storm three of her faithful sons: a white, a black, and an Indian. Two Indian brothers (Juan and Rodrigo de Hoyos) and a ten-year-old African slave (Juan Moreno), according to chronicled accounts, found the statue of Caridad del Cobre after a sudden storm almost made their boat sink in the Bay of Nipe, near the copper-mining center of El Cobre in Santiago. The image, about sixteen inches tall, was attached to a plank inscribed: "Yo soy la Virgen de la Caridad"; "I Am the Virgin of Charity." The witnesses' testimony that the figure and its clothing were not wet has become part of official and popular folk religions. For instance, the following inscription for a Caridad del Cobre reproduction in the Havana Cathedral reads: "clothed with robes that did not appear to get wet." In 1916, Pope Benedict XV officially sanctioned the cult of Caridad del Cobre as Cuba's patron, at the request of veterans of the War of Independence (which concluded in 1898 with the Spanish American War). Her sanctuary in Santiago became a Basilica in 1977. Pope John Paul II visited Caridad del Cobre's sanctuary (January 18, 1998) on his historical tour through Cuba. An interesting historical note is Ernest Hemingway's homage to the influence of Cuba on his literary production by offering his Nobel Prize medal to the Caridad del Cobre's sanctuary in Santiago de Cuba.

important deity in Afro-Cuban Santería, or Regla Ocha.³ In Santería she is worshipped as Ochún, the goddess of love, who received the gift of a lighter skin so that all of her sons in Cuba, white or black, might seek her favors. Castro's gesture in wearing *Caridad del Cobre's* medal was aimed, therefore, at the black and mulatto underclass populations, making his revolution part of a historic national ethnic struggle for social justice.⁴

Early association of religion with the revolutionary government brought international attention to Cuban folk religions little known outside the Caribbean. Theja Gunawardhana's travelogue, *Venceremos: The Cuban Revolution* (1961), traces the earliest of the revolutionary projects, and it includes photographs of black dances that appear to be out of place among photographs of socio-political practices. Without formal introductory remarks, the viewer may think that the revolutionary government promoted these dances of black origin that stemmed from the distinctive Cuban slave social system. Gunawardhana's data is, however, extremely limited, including imprecise use of geographical boundaries and faulty terms. One of the photograph captions indicates that the dance is of Yoruba origin, "common in the Antillana (West Indies) Societies known as Cabildas" (sic) (Gunawardhana n. p.). The cabildo was, as the author stated, a colonial institution responsible for the "survival of the religious beliefs, culture and dances of African groups" (Gunawardhana n. p.). Although Gunawardhana describes the dances as religious, the author does not, however, identify a particular ethnic group.

As a travelogue that intended to provide a testimonial account of the popular (black) roots of revolutionary ideology, Gunawardhana's photographs portrayed a black population mainly engaged in "ritual dancing" and public dances. One of these dances, the "bembé," Gunawardhana claims, continued to be banned to the uninitiated. The use of Afro-Cuban musical instruments, such as the chequere (a gourd-filled percussion instrument) and the batá drum, underline the indigenous

³ The development of Santería comes as a result of a series of fused ethnic and religious elements. Santería has its roots in that most ancient of Yoruba entities: the orichas. The orichas are supernatural spirits associated with natural forces organized as a highly "systematic mythology" (Bastide). Strong similarities between the orichas and the Catholic saints resulted in the merging, or syncretism, of the two religious practices (Ramos 54). This phenomenon explains the choice of the word Santería as the worship of the saints. Practitioners of Santería (Cañizares) have questioned the so-called syncretism, however.

⁴ Rumors that Castro dealt with Afro-Cuban religions abound. Migene González-Wippler recounts that "...many Cubans...owes his success and his power to the black magic of the Cuban mayombreros ('witches'). It is rumored that the powers that placed him in his fortified bastions are African deities" (10-11).

black character of these dances and celebrations and colorfully illustrate the closeness of these dances to their original African roots.

It is evident, however, that Gunawardhana intended to establish the close link between Afro-Cuban and popular cultures. One picture, "Cuban 'baile,'" seems to make this point. Unlike any of the previous shots, this photograph was taken outside of a black locus: it portrays a black woman dancing in what appears to be a bar, engaging in movements that recall the rhythms of the "bembé." In "Cuban 'baile'" there is a white man (in fact, he is the only white man in any of the photographs) who is not dancing. The caption of another photograph describes a Lucumi cabildo in strong terms of ethnic segregation: "The Lucumi cabildo have their ceremonies in consecrated closed places with their altars, deities 'orichas'. There is no ethnic integration here" (Gunawardhana n.p.).⁵ As evidence of restriction against the uninitiated's witnessing of some of the religious ceremonies, the photograph over this caption shows four batá-drum players in restful position; it is the only photograph that does not show movement in a musical performance.

In Cuba, such straightforward depiction of popular black dances also found its way into the media. In fact, Gunawardhana's "Cuban baile" was used as a promotional still photograph for a Cuban film, "Cuba baila" (Cuba Dances), information that was not documented. "Cuba baila," completed in 1960, was the first motion picture produced by the recently-created revolutionary film company, the National Institute of Cinematography (ICAIC).⁶ This film became public, however, only after Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's "Historias de la revolución" (1960); Stories of the Revolution, since it was decided that a film with revolutionary discursive content should have the honor of being the first film released by the budding revolutionary Cuban film industry (Chanan 111).⁷

Néstor Almendros (1930-1992), one of the first ICAIC directors to defect from Cuba to become an internationally-known filmmaker and a strong opponent of Castro's

⁵ The origin of the Cuban term "Lucumí" has been extensively debated. It appears to point to a port of Ulkami or Lucumí in the south of Nigeria (Barnet, "Religious" 83). The area is known as Yoruba today (southwestern Nigeria, and neighboring Republics of Benin and Togo to the west). Spanish slave traders used the word Lucumí in Cuba and in other Spanish colonies (Castellanos 39). In Cuba today, Lucumí has become synonymous with the Yoruba religious culture, specifically with the Santería practices of Havana and of the province of Matanzas (Barnet, "Religious" 83).

⁶ For a short review of "Cuba baila" see Chanan, 116-118.

⁷ In spite of a marked preference for socio-political films stressing the beginnings of revolutionary history, early interest in documentation of indigenous black music continues patent in Néstor Almendros's "Ritmo de Cuba" (Rhythm of Cuba). Another early documentary, Manet's "El negro," offers a historic overview of racism in Cuba (Chanan 98).

regime, pointed out that the earliest official disagreements in terms of aesthetics and freedom of expression took place at the ICAIC in 1961. The late director recalled the beginning of the controversy which surrounded the censorship of the documentary "P.M.," written and directed by Orlando Jiménez Leal with the collaboration of Sabá Cabrera Infante, brother of the novelist Guillermo Cabrera Infante: "It was carried out in the style of free cinema or *cinéma-verité*, which was beginning to come into fashion then: hand-held camera, images of reality caught without sets, background sound or popular music. There was no oral commentary. The film traveled through the old bars and cafes of Havana and Marianao and it described without praise or disapproval what remained of the world of night owls in the Cuba of that time" (Almendros 293-294). It should be stated that the locales of these "old bars and cafes" were predominantly historic black neighborhoods.

The film was an immediate success. First shown in a television program sponsored by "Lunes de Revolución," a literary journal, it won public acceptance and, especially, critical favor. When the producers of "P.M." decided to take their film to commercial cinemas, according to Almendros, "a copy and the negative were seized by force by the police" (294). The ideological charges brought by ICAIC officials against the film have been summarized as "a 'celebration' of nocturnal Havana that was banned by the new regime unwilling to have precisely that aspect of the nation's capital celebrated" (Burton 20).⁸

The "P.M." controversy demonstrates the minor importance of Afro-Cuban popular culture in revolutionary ideology. The earliest types of publication on Afro-Cuban subjects were limited mainly to sociological and anthropological publications by social science institutions, such as the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore. In a significant departure, the first woman and the first Afro-black woman filmmaker in Cuba, Sara Gómez, produced two short documentaries with Afro-Cuban motifs: "Iré a Santiago" (1964); "I Will Go to Santiago," a fourteen-minute travelogue of Santiago de Cuba's significant black culture, and "Y tenemos ritmo" (1967); "We Are Musical," a thirty-minute analysis of folk musical instruments basic in the performance of

⁸ The incident produces intense debates among the intellectual community, with "Lunes de Revolución" defending "P.M.," including a letter of protest and support signed by more than two hundred intellectuals (Cabrera Infante, "Cuba's" 43). The official position, reflected by the newspaper "Hoy," voice of the Cuban Communist Party, advocates elimination of "P.M.," which is considered sexually daring, and accuses "Lunes de Revolución" of ideological misconduct. On June 30, 1961, two months after the Bay of Pigs, Castro's speech "Words to the Intellectuals" puts an end to the controversy. This is the first document to establish the parameters of revolutionary aesthetics boundaries with a statement, perhaps the most quoted passage from any of his speeches: "What are the rights of writers and artists, revolutionary or not? In support of the Revolution, every right; against the Revolution, no rights" (11).

Afro-Cuban music. These two documentaries promoted a popular Afro-Cuban culture as an artistic trend that dually showcased a diverse and conflicting (from an ideological standpoint) ethnically diverse population (Benamou 76; Chanan 282-283).⁹

Sara Gómez's most notable cinematographic production, *De cierta manera*; (*In a Certain Way*), was also inspired by Afro-Cuban motifs. A fictional-documentary, it was filmed between 1973 and 1974 and released in 1977, after Julio García Espinoza and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea edited the film due to Gómez's untimely death in 1974. It stands out today as the first film (other than historical or social documentaries) to place Afro-Cuban belief systems within the parameters of contemporary revolutionary society.¹⁰

Gómez's *De cierta manera* examines factors in popular black culture that were considered responsible for keeping Afro-Cubans marginal to the revolutionary project. The film was not configured, however, as a traditional socio-political documentary. It is a hybrid form that combines the analytical techniques associated with documentary with fictional characters as samples of a case study. This amalgamation of approaches addresses two specific afflictions of particular

⁹ A formal "revolutionary Afro-Cuban" movement can be traced to 1966, with the publication of *Biografía de un cimarrón* (*The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave*, 1993), a testimonio—testimonial— that reproduces Esteban Montejo's memoirs as a runaway slave, 104 years old at the time of the interview. The producer is Miguel Barnet, a poet working at the Institute of Ethnology. Unlike in the United States, such first-person accounts from the slave's viewpoint are rare in Cuban ethnography. Barnet's introduction informs the reader that he had "forgotten" to interview a 100-year old woman, also a former slave, who had been a practitioner of Santería and Spiritism, in order to concentrate on Montejo's story as a runaway slave. This is certainly a rather paradoxical statement, since Barnet also says that his "interés primordial radicaba en aspectos generales de las religiones de origen africano que se conservan en Cuba" (5); "fundamental interest lies in general aspects of the religions of African origin that are preserved in Cuba." It is clear, however, in the closing paragraph that Barnet's construction of Montejo is in line with the political ideology of the Revolution: "Su tradición de revolucionario, cimarrón primero, luego libertador, miembro del Partido Socialista Popular más tarde, se vivifica en nuestros días en su identificación con la Revolución cubana" (10); "His tradition as a revolutionary, first a runaway slave and then a liberator, later a member of the Socialist Party, comes alive in our times in his identification with the Cuban Revolution." Montejo's "forgotten" female counterpart is left nameless, and her experiences as a religious outlaw are unrecounted.

¹⁰ Prior to "De cierta manera," historical or period films such as Manuel Octavio Gómez's "La carga del machete" (1969); "The Machete's Blow," and Gutiérrez Alea's "Una pelea cubana contra los demonios" (1972); "A Cuban Fight Against the Demons," mention various religious practices of slaves, but they do not explore the links between those beliefs and contemporary black identity.

relevance to the pre-Revolutionary marginal black community: lack of work ethics and chauvinistic attitudes.¹¹

Critical discussions on the issue of Gómez's feminist approach to the chauvinistic attitude inherent in Cuban society, in particular among black men, have been well documented (Davies; Hess; Lesage). It is evident, however, in the opening shot of *De cierta manera* that the film also considers racial attitudes toward gender issues. This scene, which features an assembly of predominantly male and predominantly black workers, is a key to understanding the character development of Mario, the film's co-protagonist. In it, one black worker defends himself against accusations of having lied about the reasons for his absence from work for several days. His statement that being a good son is more important than being a good revolutionary seems to move his audience: "he who is not a good son, comrades, cannot be a good worker, nor a man, or anything else." When he insinuates, however, that he has been set up by unnamed fellow workers, his friend Mario, also a young black man, stands up to accuse him of having lied to the assembly: "you are being disrespectful of the men, the comrades here." According to Mario, the accused was not taking care of his sick mother; in Mario's crude words, he was "shacking up with a woman." The end of the film stresses that this opening shot (repeated verbatim) is the moment of Mario's agonizing realization that respect and solidarity among male friends go beyond the social and ethnic boundaries of the childhood neighborhood.

A narrator's voice follows Mario's statement (implicitly recognizing that the previous segment was a make-believe scene) and gives a historical context to the setting. This neighborhood is "Las Yaguas," formerly known as one of the worst pre-revolutionary slums of Havana. As the film opens, the documentary shows that the slum has been physically renovated. Scenes abound of a wrecking ball and of what appears to be the construction of multi-leveled apartment complexes. The narrator's voice stresses that there is currently an educational campaign designed specifically for the Las Yaguas community underway.

It is a slow change, the voice continues, since the changes in certain socio-ethnic values are difficult to eradicate. Mario's statement (however fictional) serves as an extension of the documentary voice: His is not just a confrontation with a friend but a painful epiphany that, as a representative of Las Yaguas, he must endure in order to achieve a socio-revolutionary consciousness independent of ethnic allegiances.

¹¹ "De cierta manera" garnered critical success, in spite of Gómez's youth (she was 31 at the time of her death) and her inexperience in making feature films. Cuban film critics today often quote Gómez's "De cierta manera" among the top best Cuban films.

Polifonía

The narrator's analytical position on the subject (reflecting the official position of the Revolution) proposes that Las Yaguas's behavior (and that of the fictional Mario) can be explained in ethnological terms as a factor in "marginal cultures," dependent upon the habits, customs, and beliefs of that social class.

Another important fictional voice is that of Yolanda, a young teacher who has recently arrived in Las Yaguas, who also appears in the segments of the documentary as a teacher doing work with the predominantly black community. She is not, however, an impartial observer of Las Yaguas's popular culture. She views herself as different from the community she is working for, in spite of the fact that she is also black. The fact that she views herself as marginal to the Las Yaguas community is clear in several scenes in which she has heated arguments with local parents because of their uncaring attitudes toward their children's schooling. She is, nonetheless, sentimentally interested in Mario, whose views are very close to those of the Las Yaguas community. Yolanda's interest in Mario is fueled perhaps by her desire to gain an inside understanding of the community.

It is a heated courtship. The most obvious points of tension between the new lovers are Yolanda's strong feminist activism, reflected in her rejection of Mario's labeling her unmarried status as "sola"; "alone." As she corrects him several times, she prefers the more politically bound term of "independiente"; "independent." Yolanda also struggles against Mario's domineering attitude, an attempt to control what he views as Yolanda's strong temper.

The film's turning point reveals the reasons for Mario's so-called "macho" behavior, a response to the core of Yolanda's frequent questions on the subject. Mario's testimony of his childhood memories, along with visual aids (commented on by the narrator's voice), provide Yolanda with a personalized history of his miserable life in the slums of Las Yaguas. Yolanda's interest in modern Las Yaguas gives way to slow motion shots of the various "folk" characters that inhabit the predominantly black neighborhood. Mario and Yolanda do not comment on the scenes. It is the documentary's voice that offers a notable number of close-ups of significant popular religious icons.

This visual emphasis on Las Yaguas's religious iconography leads to an interesting ethno-religious documented clipping, which the narrator's voice fully explains. It refers to local practices of the so-called ñañigos or abacuás, an all-male religious

association with firm roots in Las Yaguas.¹² The narrator's intervention follows Mario telling Yolanda of his youthful interest in joining such a group. The narrator's ethnic footage stands out for its graphic depiction of religious sacrifices and the crude quality of the rituals. The viewer is not certain whether the scene presented has taken place in Cuba or in Africa, since no credits accompany this footage.

Mario does not dwell on his specific reasons for declining further ñáñigo religious training. He does explain, however, that he has made his decision after serving a term in the revolutionary army. When Yolanda insists upon getting more information about the Abacúa society, Mario utters his last comment on the main requirements for joining a ñáñigo association: "to be a good son, husband, and, friend," characteristics that he assumes Yolanda will approve of, since she has already established her firm belief in the strength of community and family values. Mario insists, however, that, above all, a ñáñigo must be "a man." Mario's rigid concept of manhood and fidelity to his close friends ("socios" in the Cuban vernacular) who share his social milieu is the film's central issue, not the ñáñigos or any other black religious practices in Las Yaguas.

Mario questions the social ramifications and consequences of his blind allegiance to his "socios" (whether ñáñigos or not). This is evident in his vague answer to Yolanda's inquiry about his reasons for not seeking admission to a ñáñigo group. His hesitation to dwell on this issue, which he ambiguously refers to as "a change in mentality," anticipates Mario's agony in revealing his best friend as a liar in the work assembly. Mario's newest "mentality," which his "socios" jokingly point out as Yolanda's influence, may also be attributed to his re-interpretation of the strong social values of the Abacúa. It is also obvious that behind the comments and jokes of Mario's friends that Yolanda is softening his demeanor lies the not so subtle remark that Mario's behavior is effeminate, an important subtext throughout the film.

Mario agonizes over his impromptu decision to turn in his friend as a liar. He is painfully aware that his action may be viewed as effeminate (reflective of the

¹² The demand for tighter control of the slave population in Cuba led to institution of the *cofradías*. The *cofradías* grouped together Africans of the same tribal background and promoted activities that were both recreational and educational, as part of a primitive attempt to evangelize the slaves. The slaves in Cuba welcomed incorporation into the *cofradía*. Such secret societies were common among members of African clans. Some of these groups, like the Efik, continued in the Americas. Located in the estuary area of the Cross River in the Niger Delta, the Efik were organized into mystical factions. The Egbo, for example, specialized in complex rituals involving animals, such as the deification of the leopard (Hugh 521). Transplanted into Cuba, the Egbo became known as Carabalí (after the regional location of Calabar), and during the first half of the nineteenth century, they developed a secret society called Abacúa or ñáñigos. Within the ñáñigos there existed two separate cult branches, the Rama Efo and the Efi.

influence of Yolanda). In fact, when he heatedly discusses the issue with a close friend, Mario's views on male friendship are set within the sociological context of chauvinistic and homophobic terms. Referring to his angry outburst, which he refers to as "blabbing," Mario establishes gender-based parallels: he compares his behavior to the easily influenced demeanor of a "putica"; "a cheap whore" and a "queer." It is relevant, however, that when the friend asks him what he considers proper male behavior, Mario gets insulted and shouts out his answer, "Me, me, me... a man." This echoes a previous conversation with Yolanda in which he sets male behavior within a strict Abacúá code of ethics. Mario's limiting concept of manhood may be related, however, to an Abacúá's strong homophobic stance, which includes barring homosexuals from joining their secret societies.¹³

Mario's ultimate reason for turning in his friend is not apparent; in fact, it appears to be merely a furious, unplanned attack, as the viewer will remember from the opening scene. The film's central question, why Mario turns in his best friend, remains, then, unanswered, at least within the racial context of the Las Yaguas community. In one last question during the above heated argument, Mario faces his friend's question of what the proper revolutionary code of conduct should be. Mario's answer seems to repeat his previous definition of male bonding: "what I am: hard working, because the men, 'machos,' created the Revolution."

The influence of social or religious groups is, however, at the core of Mario's personality (and, therefore, of Las Yaguas's incorporation into revolutionary social projects). One communal Afro-religious gathering, the last such documented reference, takes place within a domestic setting—the home of a local woman, introduced as a relative of Mario's. The unnamed woman is host to a religious gathering (open to everyone, hence the presence of uninitiated Yolanda and Mario)

¹³ Research on issues related to homosexual behaviors among the Cuban black community is scarce. Bernet's *Biografía de un cimarrón* deals with this subject only marginally, in spite of the fact that Montejo, his subject, was willing to talk about the sexual practices of male slaves. In particular, Montejo describes the practice of some male slaves to settle into homosexual partnerships: "Otros hacían el sexo entre ellos y no querían saber nada de las mujeres. Esa era su vida: la sodomía. Lavaban la ropa y, si tenían algún marido, también le cocinaban. Eran buenos trabajadores y se ocupaban de sembrar conucos. Les daban los frutos a sus maridos para que los vendieran a los guajiros. Después de la esclavitud fue que vino esa palabra de afeminado, porque ese asunto siguió. Para mí que no vino de Africa; a los viejos no les gustaba nada. Se llevaban de fuera a fuera con ellos. A mí, para ser sincero, no me importó nunca" (37-38); "Others copulated with one another and wanted nothing to do with women. That was their life: sodomy. They did the laundry and, if they had a husband, they also cooked for him. They were good workers and they cultivated the fields given to the slaves. They gave to their husbands the fruits of their labor so that they could sell them to the peasants. After slavery was when that word "effeminate" came into use, because that practice continued. In my opinion it did not come from Africa; old people did not like it at all. They kept them at a distance. As for me, to be frank, it made no difference to me."

in celebration of her twentieth-fifth anniversary as a practitioner. This scene is not related to ñáñigo cults but to Santería. As Martínez-Echazábal has stated (17), this fact is not mentioned by any of the characters or by the documentary's voice. The camera shot is short, with a series of soundless close-ups that stress the commonality of the religious icons between the Abacuá and Santería, including a motionless goat. (This is the only gloomy shot; the angle of the close-up gives an eerie feeling of expectancy that the goat is there as part of sacrifice rituals.) The ceremony, unlike the ñáñigo shots, is not a gender-segregated rite; in fact, the women present at this ceremony outnumber the men.

The shot is voyeuristic, as are the previous documented segments of Las Yaguas. The camera's intense gaze on the santos (Roman Catholic icons), central decorative items of Santería altars, has a dominant role in the scene of the monologue by the Santera to her guests (Mario and Yolanda). Central to her description of the saints is the woman's comment that without her devoted care, these icons are only "piedra and caracoles"; "rocks and shells."

The film's title, *De cierta manera*, is elusive, resisting a concrete or even literal translation. "Up to a Point" or "In a Certain Way" seems to resonate in the various ethnographic scenes (such as the Abacuá and the Santería rituals) that point to possible reasons for the socially-bound behavior of the protagonists. This is, however, an open-ended discussion. As the end of the film stresses, Mario cannot explain or, at least, verbalize the reason for breaking away from what he labels "men's moral code." The last scene presents Mario and Yolanda, walking together, holding hands, as they head back to Las Yaguas's modern multi-leveled housing project, which the viewer assumes is the same witnessed by the documentary in its building stages. The visual references to a black culture (whether religious or social) are eliminated from the shot, which emphasizes the modernity of the construction. Modernism becomes, therefore, equated with revolutionary behavior; the Las Yaguas community will undergo a painful epiphany similar to that of Mario.

This lack of a formal conclusion seems to suggest that García Espinoza and Gutiérrez Alea shied away from taking a definite stand about what revolutionary institutions should do in regard to the preservation or suppression of Afro-Cuban religious practices. Although I have found nowhere an indication that a weak ending was what Sara Gómez intended for her film, I doubt that it was her choice. In a film with such a strong goal to examine Afro-Cuban marginal socio-religious cultures by means of performing issues related to controversial practices, such a romanticized and passive ending seems to be out of place.

Other Cuban film productions dealing with Santería were limited mainly to factual documentaries, such as black filmmaker Gloria Rolando's "Oggún" (1993) and "El alacrán" (The Scorpion, 1999). An exception to a rather ethnographic approach to Santería is the musical comedy, "¡Patakín! Quiere decir ¡fábula!" ("Patakín! Means Fable!", 1984) by director Manuel Octavio Gómez. In this film, a patakín, the Yoruba religious oral tradition, places the story of Shangó, god of thunder and fire, in modern Cuba, presented by means of choreography that stresses the comic facets of daily life on the island.¹⁴

There have been dramatic changes in the racial makeup of those seeking to enter Santería centers (unlike the monolithic black and mulatto locale in *De cierta manera*). As many visitors to Cuba have experienced, Santería's religious ceremonies and related public practices, mainly musical events, are actively facilitated by governmental tourist agencies (Oppenheimer 338-355). In my own experience during my last trip to Havana in 1996, the visits with Santería babalaos, or "priests," and attendance to public bembés are easily arranged by both official cultural or tourist institutions.¹⁵ The allure of Santería remains a major attraction for foreign travelers and for those discovering "popular" Afro-Cuba. At the center, the delicate balance between the financial gains for both governmental institutions and individual practitioners, and the faithful observance of ancient Yoruba rites, is at stake.

Cited Works

Almendros, Néstor. *Cinemanía*. Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1992.

Barnet, Miguel. *Biografía de un cimarrón*. Barcelona: Ediciones Ariel, 1968.

---. "La Regla Ocha: The Religious System of Santería." *Sacred Possessions: Vodou, Santería, Obeah, and the Caribbean*. Ed. Margarite Fernández Olmos & Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert. Rutgers University Press, 1997. 79-100.

Bastide, Roger. *Las Americas negras*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1969.

¹⁴ Other films with substantial mentions of Santería or black religious practices are: Sergio Giral, "El otro Francisco" (1975); Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, "La última cena" (1976); Juan Carlos Tabío, "Plaf" (1985); Rebeca Chávez, "Buscando a Chano Pozo" (1988); Miriam Talavera, "Yo soy Juana Bacallao" (1989); Julio García Espinoza, "Las aventuras de Juan Quintín."

¹⁵ For a testimonial article on the experiences of an American visitor in Havana with a Santero babalao, refer to Conger Beasley.

Polifonía

- Beasley, Conger Jr. "In the Belly of the Beast." *The North American Review* 281: 3 (May 1996): 10-14.
- Benamou, Catherine. "Cuban Cinema: On the Threshold of Gender." *Redirecting the Gaze: Gender, Theory, and Cinema in the Third World*. Ed. Diana Robin & Ira Jaffe. State University of New York Press, 1999. 67-98.
- Burton, Julianne. "Toward a History of Social Documentary in Latin America." *The Social Documentary in Latin America*. Ed. Julianne Burton. University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990. 3-30.
- Cabrera Infante, Guillermo. "Cuba's Shadow." *Film Comment* 21:3 (1985): 43-45.
- Cáñizares, Raúl. *Walking with the Night: The Afro-Cuban World of Santería*. Rochester: Destiny Books, 1992.
- Castellanos, Isabel. "From Ulkumí to Lucumí: A Historical Overview of Religious Acculturation in Cuba." *Santería Aesthetics in Contemporary Latin American Art*. Ed. Arturo Lindsay. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996. 39-50.
- Castro, Fidel. *Palabras a los intelectuales*. Havana: Ediciones del Consejo Nacional de Cultura, 1961.
- Chanan, Michael. *The Cuban Image. Cinema and Cultural Politics in Cuba*. London: BFI Publishing, 1985.
- Davies, Catherine. "Reply to John Hess." *Screen* 40:2 (Summer 1999): 208-211.
- . "Modernity, Masculinity and Imperfect Cinema in Cuba." *Screen* 38:4 (1997): 345-59.
- Hess, John. "No mas Habermas, or ... rethinking Cuban cinema in the 1990s." *Screen* 40:2 (Summer 1999): 203-207.
- Hugh, Thomas. *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom*. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.
- Martínez-Echazábal, Lourdes. "The Politics of Afro-Cuban Religion in Contemporary Cuban Cinema." *Afro-Hispanic Review* 13:1 (Spring 1994): 16-22.

Polifonía

- González-Wippler, Migene. *Santería: African Magic in Latin America*. New York: Original Publications, 1990.
- Gunawardhana, Theja. *Venceremos: The Cuban Revolution*. Colombo, Ceylon: Swadeshi Printers, 1961.
- Lesage, Julia. "'One Way or Another': Dialectical, Revolutionary, Feminist." *Jump Cut* 20 (May 1979): 20-23.
- Lezcano, José A. "De cierta manera con Sara Gómez." *Cine cubano* 127 (1989): 3-11.
- Oppenheimer, Andrés. *Castro's Final Hour: The Secret Story Behind the Coming Downfall of Communist Cuba*. New York: Touchstone, 1992
- Ramos, Miguel "Willie." Afro-Cuban Orisha Worship." *Santería Aesthetics in Contemporary Latin American Art*. Ed. Arturo Lindsay. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996. 51.76.
- Szulc, Tad. *Fidel: A Critical Portrait*. New York: William Morrow, 1986.