

"NEITHER RED NOR BLACK!": CUBA, AFRICA, AND THE POLITICS OF
POSTERS

by

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the production of a body of posters in Cuba by the Organisation in Solidarity with the Peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America (OSPAAAL) between 1967 and 1972. OSPAAAL's posters have become one of Cuba's most popular forms of mass culture, reaching production levels of five million by the 1970s. Shipped to progressive bookstores and households across Europe and North America, OSPAAAL's posters vied for the attention of youth audiences sympathetic to the burgeoning anti-capitalist movements emerging around the world. Following their first production in 1967, OSPAAAL's posters adopted a new hybridised form that combined the internationalism of Western aesthetics such as Pop Art, Op Art, and Psychedelic Art, with Afro-Cuban symbols, references to Cuba's historical past. Producing a new visual language, OSPAAAL's posters have been charged with propelling the concerns of Cuban culture onto the international stage in the 1960s. But the use of references to Afro-Cubans revealed a complicated negotiation of racial concerns that continued to persist in Cuban society. What functions would the adoption of Afro-Cuban symbols play when translated from nationalist images into internationalist icons? Did the integrationist desire of the Revolution in creating a unified concept of nationhood mask other social and economic conditions within Cuba? It is this core motivation behind the production of OSPAAAL's posters that will form the basis of this discussion. In OSPAAAL's posters, the Revolution would discover a means of expressing a new historical consciousness, one that would provide a place of privilege to Afro-Cubans. Through the production of these posters, the Revolution felt it could convey to Afro-Cubans their commitment to the recovery of their historical roots.

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Introduction

In 1967, following the creation of the Organisation in Solidarity with the Peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America (OSPAAAL) in Cuba, a new type of political poster emerged known most commonly as Cuba's "Art of Solidarity". Through the medium of the silkscreen poster, OSPAAAL would commit to representing Cuba's military, economic, and ideological aid to emerging decolonizing nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. OSPAAAL, with its headquarters in Havana, was conceived as an alliance between nations that felt subordinated by the bifurcated climate of global cold war politics. Seeking a means to challenge the increasing dominance of the United States and the Soviet Union in the 1960s, the participating countries saw OSPAAAL as affording the ability to create a 'third-front', a new form of global power that would emerge from anti-imperialist and decolonising efforts. In addition to OSPAAAL's coordination of military, economic, and medical support throughout these regions, it was also charged with the responsibility of creating a visual program to represent OSPAAAL's commitment to solidarity. In the first five years following the creation of OSPAAAL, millions of posters were produced for display both within and outside Cuba, and echoing the internationalist stance of OSPAAAL, the posters, through their distribution with *Tricontinental* magazine, reached audiences throughout Europe and North America. By the middle of the 1970s, OSPAAAL's posters had become one of the most commonly identifiable forms of Cuban art internationally, celebrated for their commitment to solidarity and humanitarian ideals.

In 1969 Jesús Forjans, one of OSPAAAL's artists produced *Day of Solidarity with Africa, May 22 to 28*. (1.1) The poster shows an African tribal statue placed against a background grid of Soviet AK-47 guns, ammunition, and other automatic weapons.

Holding rudimentary weapons of a knife and shield, the statue's impassive and static nature is only emphasized by the graphic quality of the automatic weapons behind it. Along the bottom of the poster, translated into four languages – Arabic, English, French and Spanish – reads Cuba's commitment to solidarity with Africa, beside which is OSPAAAL's symbol of a globe, fist and gun. Forjans' poster, with its combination of traditional and modern symbols, discloses an artistic program adopted almost unanimously by OSPAAAL's artists following 1967. In Forjans' poster, OSPAAAL's conception of solidarity is revealed through the juxtaposition of the traditional symbol of the African statue, set against weapons of modern day warfare in the form of Soviet guns and ammunition. Understanding this peculiar combination of traditional symbols with references to modern weaponry, as in Forjans' poster, raises a series of crucial questions. If OSPAAAL's function was to provide support and agency to decolonising efforts in Africa, then was there any significance to depicting Africa through references to traditional iconography? What did Forjans' method of depicting Africa indicate about Cuba's attitude towards the continent? Did the conjunction of concepts of 'tradition' and 'modernity' suggest a benevolent casting of African nations? Was the adoption of Pop Art's repetitive visual strategies in the depiction of the background entirely a reflection of Forjans' artistic knowledge of international art movements? Or did its adoption contribute to constructing a particular meaning of solidarity that became the preoccupation of OSPAAAL's artists following 1967? But perhaps most importantly, did Forjans' poster reveal more Cuban concerns than solely a celebration of international solidarity?

In order to answer these questions, it is important to examine the climate of Cuban society at the end of the 1960s. One of the most persistent concerns for the Cuban government following Fidel Castro's victory in 1959 was the definition of a conception of

nationalism. In fact, the search for a unique cultural identity at the service of defining a conception of nationalism had been one of the prevalent themes of Cuban politics and culture throughout the twentieth century. For Castro, the economic, racial, and social conflicts that fractured the Cuban population could only be reconciled under the definition of a coherent concept of nationhood. Cubans, according to Castro, would need to define a new *patria* that simultaneously acknowledged Cuba's cultural past, while signalling the socialist nature of Cuba's future. From the beginning Castro and his government would commit almost all of their efforts towards achieving this goal. Recognising the need to signal the importance of the state of Cuba's new nationhood, Castro made repeated references in speeches and writings to the methods through which Cubans could begin to shape their new understanding of Cuban nationalism. And one of the most important methods, for Castro, was the desire to express the unique cultural and racial make-up of Cuban society. Castro's greatest claim to the political legitimacy of the Revolution was the failure of Fulgencio Batista to build the *patria* for all and with all that had been fought for by Cubans during their efforts for independence in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The 'nation for all and with all' that had been imagined by intellectuals such as Jose Martí and Fernando Ortiz had, according to Castro, remained an elusive goal. In 1959, it was estimated that Afro-Cubans made up at least half of the total population, if not more.¹ But decades of institutionalised racism had left this segment predominantly under-skilled and under-educated, more than eighty percent were illiterate, and sixty percent lived in heavily concentrated agrarian sectors with rampant unemployment. Castro saw this as the greatest fissure in defining a coherent idea of the Cuban nation, and began to assert the necessity of racial synthesis as the first step towards establishing a unique Cuban *patria*.

"There is racial discrimination in Cuba, but to a much lesser degree. We feel that our Revolution will help to eliminate those prejudices and injustices that remain latent. For the time being, we have given proof in our

revolutionary struggle of an absolute identification and brotherhood with men of all skin colors. In that sense, ours are the thoughts of Martí and we would be neither revolutionaries nor democrats if we were not free of all types of discrimination."²

Efforts towards ending racial discrimination would become the concern of almost all segments of Cuban society – politically, culturally and economically. Everything from Cuban domestic policies, to Cuban artistic production would in some way evoke the ideal of racial synthesis. Increasing references to Afro-Cubans, their religions, symbols and cultural practices began to emerge in visual and literary forms. And by the end of the 1960s, the prevalence of Afro-Cuban references in Cuban society would emphasise the crucial role that race played in conceptions of Cuban nationalism. During the first half of the 1960s most of these references were found in domestic sources. From newspaper and magazine advertisements in sources such as *Revolución* and *M-26-7*, to political posters disseminated from various cultural agencies, the discussion of Cuban nationalism would reiterate a commitment to integrating Afro-Cubans into Cuban society at large. But at the end of the 1960s, with the creation of OSPAAAL, the conception and function of Cuban nationalism would serve an entirely new purpose. OSPAAAL, according to Castro, would provide Cuba a way to remain a crucial participant in international politics. In order to achieve this, OSPAAAL felt that it needed to convey Cuba as a stable, unified nation, whose abilities to assume a leading role internationally was predicated on the coherence of its nationalism. In visual form, through its posters, OSPAAAL's artists began to investigate and adopt symbols and images that could appropriately convey this new Cuban nationalism. Almost systematically references to African symbols began to emerge in OSPAAAL's posters. What would the function of this internationalist turn reveal about the place of Afro-Cubans in Cuban society? Did their presence as icons of Cuban nationalism suggest that the ideal of racial synthesis had indeed been achieved? Was the use of Afro-Cuban symbols in OSPAAAL's posters

removed from their preceding domestic functions? Mutated from their domestic function as reconciliatory sites for racial synthesis, into proclamations of international solidarity, the use of Afro-Cuban symbols in OSPAAAL's posters played a significant role in revealing the fissures that marked Cuban nationalism in the late 1960s.

The role of OSPAAAL's posters, and in particular their use of Afro-Cuban symbols, has remained in large part unexamined in the predominate literature on the subject. Over the last fifteen years Cuban art has become increasingly prevalent internationally, and with it an interest in investigating both its contemporary and historical dimensions. David Craven's *Art and Revolution in Latin America* (2002), Gerardo Mosquera's *Art Cuba: the New Generation* (2001)³ and Luis Camnitzer's *New Art of Cuba* (1994) are among this critical reinvestigation that has proved crucial to my analysis. However, despite these sources, Cuban art in general remains largely unexamined. In particular, critical investigations of Cuban mass culture, including films and propaganda,⁴ have been limited to celebrations of their 'revolutionary spirit', retaining shades of nostalgic Marxism, under the guise of intellectual socialism.⁵ Discussions of OSPAAAL's posters have unfortunately fallen into this latter category.⁶ There remains a surprising lack of investigation into more specific frameworks related particularly to how these posters negotiated issues of race, class and gender. This study is particularly interested in the intersection between discourses of race and debates of nationalism, and their manifestation in posters produced by OSPAAAL between 1967 and 1972.⁷ What functions would the adoption of Afro-Cuban symbols play when translated into internationalist images? Did the integrationist desire of the Revolution in creating a unified concept of nationhood mask other social and economic conditions within Cuba? I will interrogate the moment of the production of OSPAAAL's posters in order to understand the issues raised by these questions. In particular, the

ways in which OSPAAAL's adoption of Afro-Cuban symbols retained historical connections to earlier conceptions of race. Of crucial importance is the ways in which discourses of nationalism intersected with notions of race, not only following 1959, but in their manifestations in the nineteenth and early twentieth century; particularly the methods through which conceptions of nationalism sought to mask racial concerns. The uses of African symbols in OSPAAAL's posters are not removed from the antecedent discussions of race and its place within Cuban nationalism. OSPAAAL's posters, while reflecting the domestic specificities of their moment of production in the late 1960s, also played a significant role in the simultaneous propulsion of Cuba onto the international stage. While their use of African symbols revealed continuations of earlier historical dimensions, their use as icons of Cuban nationalism internationally marked a new phase in the function of race within discourses of nationalism.

Notes to Introduction:

¹ Carlos Moore *Castro, The Blacks and Africa* "Fidel Castro had assumed mastery over a population estimated at 6,700,000 of which conceivably about 50 percent were of African descent" p15

² Fidel Castro, *Speech*, January 23, 1959 reprinted in Moore p15

³ Holly Block ed. *Art Cuba : The New Generation* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001)

⁴ Michael Canan's *The Cuban Image* is one of the only exceptions in its critical examination of Cuban cinema and its relation to social and political constructions.

⁵ Perhaps the most famous example is Susan Sontag's discussion of the Cuban political poster in *The Art of Revolution: 96 Posters from Castro's Cuba, 1959-1970* ed. Donald Stermer (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970) "It is natural for the artist – who is, so often, a critic of his society – to think, when caught up in a revolutionary movement in his own country, that what he considers revolutionary is art is akin to the political revolution going on, and to believe that he can put his art in the service of the revolution ... Cuban posters reflect the revolutionary communist ethic of Cuba [but] good as they are, the Cuban posters are not artistically radical or revolutionary ... Neither can they be considered manifestations of a politically revolutionary conception of art, beyond the fact that many though hardly all of the posters illustrate the political ideas, memories, and hopes of the revolution." pp xvi-xvii

⁶ David Kunzle's analysis of the Cuban poster in *Che Guevara: Icon, Myth, and Message* (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1997) and in "Cuba's Art of Solidarity" *Decade of Protest: Political Posters from the United States, Viet Nam, Cuba 1965-1975* ed. Susan Martin (Los Angeles: Smart Art Press, 1996) has for the most part been the most critical. But Kunzle also falls into celebratory descriptions of Cuba's mass media forms. "This much is apparent from the study undertaken here of Cuban public graphics – posters, vallas (billboards), and magazine illustration. Those visual media which continue in the commercial art of the bourgeois West to plumb new depths of moral and aesthetic abasement, have attained, by common consent of critics in bourgeois and socialist countries alike, a higher standard in Cuba today than anywhere else in Latin America. The very media which in pre-revolutionary Cuba were the most completely subservient to consumerism, have effected a dramatic transition for which there is no precedent anywhere. All the arts in Cuba – theatre, music, dance, literature – have undergone a radical transformation; but it is in the visual mass media which capitalism evolved to serve its own specific and historic needs, that the transition to socialist values appears the most extraordinary." David Kunzle "Public Graphics in Cuba: A Very Cuban Form of Internationalist Art" *Latin American Perspectives*, vol. 2, iss. 4 (supplement issue: Cuba: La Revolution en Marcha (1975))p89

⁷ These dates are in no way meant to suggest that concepts of race did not remain a crucial aspect of nationalism in the 1970s and 1980s. Instead, they were used to limit the scope of this discussion, and to concentrate a more detailed understanding of the specificities that race played within this period of five years. To avoid a critical reproduction of static and essentialist categories of race, my use of the concept of "Afro-Cuba" needs to be immediately addressed. In this study, the concept of "Afro-Cuba" is not meant to represent the realities of Cuba's social and political condition for Afro-Cubans, for this is a futile reconciliatory effort. Cuban society remains today deeply conflicted, with race continuing to play a significant factor. Instead, "Afro-Cuba" is used to index the numerous symbolic functions that race played within nationalism in Cuba: "Afro-Cuba" as the essentialising representation of race relations and Blackness, not as part of the antithetical grouping of coloniser and colonised, or margin and periphery.

Chapter One

Formations of Cuban Nationalism

"The nation fills the void left in the uprooting of communities and kin, and turns that loss into the language of metaphor. Metaphor, as the etymology of the word suggests, transfers the meaning of home and belonging, [...] across those distances and cultural differences that span the imagined community of the nation-people."

Homi Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, 1990

"Afro-Cubanism had all the makings of a folkloric spectacle whose political effect was to displace and obfuscate actual social problems and conflicts, especially racial ones."

Vera Kutzinski, *Sugars Secrets* (1993)

The desire of the Cuban government to seek unity among its citizenry in an effort to achieve a coherent concept of nationhood is a particularly ambivalent ambition which grows from an awareness that, "despite the certainty with which historians speak of the 'origins' of nation as a sign of the 'modernity' of society, the cultural temporality of the nation inscribes a much more transitional social reality."¹ This could not be truer than in the climate of Cuban politics in the early 1960s. Cuban society remained deeply divided by racial, economic, and cultural differences. Concerned with the increasing fracturing of Cuba's population, Castro at the beginning of the 1960 began to look for ways to consolidate these various elements. For Castro, of greatest concern was the need to achieve racial synthesis as a way towards the increasing stabilisation of Cuban society. But in the first years after his victory, while the government's cultural and employment policies reflected the rhetorical desire to erase discrimination, the methods of their implementation revealed a marked level of ambivalence. In order to understand the discursive functions employed in the construction of Cuban nationhood both before and following Castro's victory, it is necessary to investigate the "complex strategies of cultural identification and discursive address that function in the name of 'the people' or

'the nation' and makes them the immanent subjects and objects of a range of social and literary narratives."² Any conception of a homogenised 'nationhood' must be met with scepticism, for in its insistence on stability, it reveals the "containing thresholds of meaning that must be crossed, erased, and translated [...] into the *in-between* spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated."³ Benedict Anderson reiterates this by writing:

"If nation-states are widely conceded to be 'new' and 'historical', the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and, still more important, glide into the limitless future."⁴

In Cuba, from the earliest definitions of nationalism in the nineteenth century, to revisions following 1959, the only static feature remained the predominance of Afro-Cuban culture. But the functions of Afro-Cuban symbols in Cuban society were not invested with one singular meaning or conception. In Cuba, Afro-Cuban symbols became sites of reconciliation, invested in what Vera Kutzinski calls the "iconic mulata", a culturally produced racial stereotype that revealed anxieties about miscegenation, amalgamation and equality; a "symbolic container for all the tricky questions about how race, gender, and sexuality inflect the power relations that obtain in colonial and postcolonial Cuba."⁵ Unlike the representation of a single type of figure, as in racially stereotyped ethnographic images prevalent in eighteenth and nineteenth century examples, the iconic mulata would emerge in a variety of forms in Cuban newspapers, magazines and posters: images of African statues, masks, and symbols, photographs of African guerrilla revolutionaries, photographs of children, illustrations of "Afro-Cuban" life, writings on Santería, and other Afro-Cuban religions.

Historical Frameworks

To understand to function of the emergence of Afro-Cuban symbols in the posters produced by OSPAAAL following 1967, it is necessary to understand the historical ways in

which conceptions of race played a role in discourses of nationalism in Cuba. Contrary to the efforts made by Castro and his government to celebrate Cuba as a racially egalitarian paradise, Cuban society remained deeply segregated following Castro's victory. Much of the framework of race relations in Cuba had been the result of social and economic conditions in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the decades leading up to the Revolution, Afro-Cubans had been denied equal access to education, employment, and recreation. White-only Cuban clubs, both political and social, had gained increasing support, and Cuban art, both literary and visual was produced almost entirely by Euro-Cubans⁶. The first debates about the nation began in the middle of the nineteenth century when progressive Creole bourgeois, and segments of the intellectual elite, sought political alternatives to Spanish colonialism.⁷ A fight against Spanish colonialism, for many Cubans involved in a search for independence, was seen as paramount to Cuba moving from the past into the future. In both the visual and literary arts, artists and writers attempted to produce symbols and metaphors that could become icons of this new Cuban national identity. The rapid industrialisation and modernisation of Cuban industry in the early nineteenth century coincided with these efforts towards independence and produced a conception of Cuban identity that in turn promoted progress and civilisation as its central feature. The introduction of steam powered mills in 1810, telegraph service in the 1850s, telephones in the 1880s and electricity by the 1890s meant that almost from the beginning, conceptions of Cuban nationalism would celebrate the rapid modernisation of Cuban society.

"Cubans derived enormous satisfaction from the North American display of material progress. They, too, aspired to comfort – the English word passed into Cuban lexicon directly as "comfort" or its corrupted form "confort"; they also were conscious of convenience, to things possessed of value and worth. All of this confirmed the proposition of "Cuban" as modern and civilised and rightfully identified with things that constituted progress. These had become *their* accomplishments, a part of the material culture and value system claimed as Cuban."⁸

Modernity, according to writers in the nineteenth century, could only be fully realised if Cuba achieved independence from Spain, and the degree to which Spain lagged behind Cuba's rapid modernisation only helped fortify their claims.

"The discourse on nationality developed at the apogee of the positivist vogue and the attendant emphasis on progress and civilisation. The ideology and features of the material culture with which positivism was associated resonated among Cubans contemplating national forms ... No difference was as sharply drawn as the notion of Cuba as modern and Spain as backward. [...] Simply put, to be Cuban was superior to being Spanish."⁹

Colonialism itself became proof of Spain's backwardness, a defiance of civilisation and progress. Artists, writers, and intellectuals felt that Cubans needed to define for themselves what it meant to be specifically Cuban, identifying the precise elements and symbols that were unique to the island's population. The first conceptions of Cuban nationalism consistently drew claim to the superiority of Cuban culture in relation to Spain. For Cuba, Spain remained their only obstacle in the realisation of an independent nationality. Denying the value of their Euro-Cuban roots almost immediately, writers and artists began to focus on the plethora of African symbols that were dominant throughout the island.¹⁰ The Afro-Cuban population, a legacy of centuries of slavery and colonisation, had by the nineteenth century become one of the largest cultural groups in Cuban society. Adopting the symbols of this population was, according to many writers and artists, a way for Cuba to establish an independent cultural identity, a step towards complete political and social independence. Through celebrating the *mestizaje*¹¹ of Cuban culture, the racial mixing of Afro-Cubans, Euro-Cubans and Asian-Cubans, it was felt that Cuba could establish a distinctive profile: one that would integrate the cultural mainstream of its Western heritage with internal modalities that made active its non-Western elements.

The term "Afro-Cuban" was first used by anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in his book *Los Negros Brujos* (1906)¹². Ortiz was concerned with wading through the

"intricate jungle of African cultural roots" to examine the presence of African cultures within Cuba. He saw them existing in a "state of confusion", mostly as a result of four centuries of slavery.¹³

"It was as though the four centuries of slave trade had deliberately hacked out and laid waste whole mountains of black humanity and thrown the countless branches, roots, flowers and seeds, torn from all the jungles of Africa, onto the soil of Cuba."¹⁴

Ortiz began to examine the consequences of the discourse of the *mestizaje*, a synonym for racial amalgamation, and a peculiar form of multiculturalism that celebrated diversity while disavowing divisive social realities.¹⁵ Ortiz argued that Cuban culture was at its base a mulatto or *mestizaje* culture, and that this racial makeup could be celebrated as uniquely Cuban. Ortiz felt it was the obligation of white Cubans to examine the relationship of 'Negroes' to the social problems he observed plaguing them economically and socially. He felt that while "the study of the Negro was a heavy and laborious task, open to ridicule and yielding no profit", it was the responsibility of white Cuba to help to stop the Negro wishing to "forget himself and to abhor his race so as not to recall its martyrdom and frustration".¹⁶ For Ortiz, national identity did not have a particular essence, since it was always in the process of becoming, but he believed in identifying certain collective traits and traditional customs as the essence of national identity.¹⁷ He proposed the metaphor of the *ajiaco* (stew) as a way to index the intense racial and ethnic makeup of Cuban culture: Spanish, African, Asiatic, Anglo-American, and French. The *ajiaco* was a "big stew with diverse ingredients where the gravy left at the bottom represent[ed] the integrated nationality, the synthesis."¹⁸ This approach, Ortiz believed, allowed for an understanding of national culture characterised by impurity, syncretism and heterogeneity. For Ortiz, Cuba's history of constant immigration and settlement created condition for the "deracialisation" of Cuban culture as a whole. He wanted to posit fluidity and hybridity as keys to Cuban identity.¹⁹

Both literary and artistic production in Cuba during the early nineteenth century revealed this negotiation between the cultural, racial, and social relations that played a significant factor in conceptualising nationalism. *El día de reyes*, a lithograph produced in 1847 by Frédéric Miahle, is one of the most famous examples of this new iconography. The lithograph shows Afro-Cubans of the Abakuá secret society wearing African dress masks and dancing in San Francisco Square on the Feast of the Epiphany, the only day of the year that they were permitted to practice this ceremony. *El día de reyes* was one of four lithographs produced by Miahle as part of a book titled *Viaje Al Rededor de la Isla de Cuba* (1847-1848), focussing on the importance of integration between social and racial classes in Cuba, as a way of understanding the Cuban patterns of behaviour involved. In Cuba, while factors of nationality had always taken precedence over racial issues, these early examples revealed that in the nineteenth century, racial integration had become an important stratum of nationalism. Miahle, along with many of his contemporaries, recognised the need to create folk types in whom the Cuban population at large could recognise themselves, folk types that could then be translated into national symbols.²⁰ From the beginning, numerous books and lithographic prints were published reflecting the concerted effort made to reiterate the prominence of Afro-Cubans and their symbols in the Cuban national landscape. These celebrations of Afro-Cuban symbols were seen by many writers and artists to serve two crucial functions. First, it was seen as a way for Cuban society to achieve the racially egalitarian republic that had been imagined by José Martí, one of the first proponents of defining Cuban nationalism.²¹ In Cuba, according to these early definitions of nationalism, racial tensions would serve as a reminder of Spanish colonialism, and would need to be eradicated. Second, and perhaps of more immediate concern to claiming Cuba's independence from Spain, was the clarity through which Afro-Cuban symbols could convey the cultural makeup of Cuban society as distinct from their

European colonisers. While Cuba's Spanish legacy would maintain its hegemonic position in its intelligentsia and politicians, the symbols and markers of Cuban national culture would reflect the conditions of Cuban society, particularly the uniqueness of its racially mixed population. It was felt that one of the distinct characteristics of Cuban culture, and culture throughout the Caribbean region, was that it was "born from a process of creolization and hybridization."²² Throughout the late nineteenth century, images of Afro-Cubans would be displayed as spectacles²³ of cultural capital, used to sell everything from emerging revolutionary ideologies, to tobacco and sugar. In fact, by the end of the nineteenth century, a popular Cuban sentiment conflated sugar with the miscegenation and "luscious mixed pigmentation" of Cuban women²⁴.

Although the nineteenth century desire to represent the unity of Cuban society through depicting archetypal folk images of Afro-Cubans continued, like those of Miahle, by the beginning of the twentieth century nationalistic values had shifted from bucolic landscapes to depictions of urban realities. Notions of Cubanness in the visual arts became identified with urban themes, with the depiction of racial integration: whites and blacks brought together to create the image of the new Cuba. To this end, an exhibition of *Arte Nuevo* held in May 1927 in Havana had perhaps the greatest influence on the way in which Afro-Cuban images would be taken up at the service of producing a nationalist ideology in the period before the Revolution. Known as the Generation of 1927,²⁵ these artists sought to create work that exemplified the emergence of a new means of representing concepts of Cuban nationalism; and Afro-Cuban images, religions, music, dance, and symbols would inhabit a central role in the production of this new aesthetic form. In painting, members of the *vanguardia*, an artistic avant-garde that emerged in Havana in the late 1920s, began to use Afro-Cuban themes to create what they perceived as a new, "authentic" art. Eduardo Abela, Carlos Enríquez, Víctor

Manuel and Wilfredo Lam all explored the cultural expressions of Afro-Cubans, in an effort to represent "Cubanness in the language of art".²⁶ Wanting to create an art form that would provide a "new and positive view of Afro-Cubans and of their previously ignored contribution to Cuban culture"²⁷, the *vanguardia* painters returned to the concept of 'inclusivity' as a crucial stratum of their new ideology. For the Generation of 1927, shattering the decorum of earlier conservative images of Cuban nationalism like Miahle's, would become the focus of their efforts. Themes of "*confianza*, sensuality, lust, *machismo*, Afro-Cuban music, [and] the nobility of the *guajiro*"²⁸ needed to be celebrated for their unique Cuban nature, and Afro-Cuban music and dance became elevated to the status of "national cultural symbols", adopted by mainstream popular music and entertainment. The shaping of this theory in the 1920s and 30s known as Afro-Cubanism, coincided with the publication of one of Cuba's most famous and important journals, the *Revista de Avance* in 1927. *Revista* began to publish the poetry and writings of Felipe Pichardo Moya, Lino Novás Calvo, and Félix Pita Rodríguez, whose conception of Afro-Cubanism would provide the crucial framework under which it was taken up. Afro-Cubanism, and its literary counterpart *poesía mulata*, used "black motifs" in language, music, dances and beliefs, to "exalt Cubanness and national independence."²⁹ These "black motifs" would emerge in stereotypical expressions that placed 'lo negro' as the central concern of representing the racial and cultural synthesis of Cubanness.

"Cuba's soul in mestizo, and it is from this soul, not the skin, that we derive our definite color. Someday it will be called 'Cuban color.'"³⁰

Of the artists working during this period, it perhaps the development of Afro-Cuban symbols in the work of Wilfredo Lam in the 1930s and 1940s that was seen to provide the most important means towards the pursuit for national universality based on the projection of Cuban roots and visual codes. Lam, whose mixed heritage included

Chinese, African and Spanish roots, joined the Surrealist movement in the late 1930s, along with Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo of Mexico, Roberto Matta of Chile and Aimé Césaire of Martinique. One of Surrealism's greatest appeals, according to Lam, was its desire to forge alliances with "[p]eoples of colour, first because it has sided with them against all forms of imperialism and white brigandage...and secondly because of the profound affinities between Surrealism and 'primitive' thought."³¹ For Lam, his references to Afro-Cuban religions through the visual language of Surrealism provided a synthesis between the 'primitive' and the 'avant garde'. This synthesis, Lam believed, would enable him to produce a new "line of future artistic development resulting from the irruption of the peripheries into contemporary culture."³² Lam's use of the simultaneous hybridity of the *mestizaje* concept of the Afro-Cuban, with the formal references to both Western and non-Western form, allowed his work to function as succinctly to audiences in Europe, as it would to Cubans searching for nationalistic values in his work. In Lam's work, Afro-Cuban religions like Santería were integral symbols, perhaps revealing a desire to reconcile his own mixed background: "...to paint the drama of my country, but by thoroughly expressing the Negro spirit, the beauty of the plastic art of the blacks."³³

This particular manifestation of Afro-Cubanism in the 1920s and 30s was a direct result of Cuban search for independence from the cultural, economic and political domination of the United States. By the late 1930s Cuba had become one of the most popular tourist destinations for Americans, reaching more than two million annually by 1940.³⁴ In Cuba, many of these travellers could experience the allure of a foreign country with "Old World charm", while still having the "availability of things familiar."³⁵

"It was precisely the juxtaposition of the foreign with the familiar, the old with the new, to be abroad without being away that was at the heart of the Cuban appeal to North American sensibilities. Cuba offered antiquity without sacrificing modernity, access to the exotic with minimal exposure to risk³⁶ ... The notion that Cuba existed specifically for the pleasure of North

Americans took hold early, lasted long, and was central to the meaning associated with being a US tourist in Cuba."³⁷

The profound impact of this growth in tourism was measured most succinctly in Cuba's urban landscape. During the 1920s and 30s Americans began to open and operate Cuban nightclubs, cabarets and hotels that sold brands of liquor and food familiar to their patrons: "the familiar world of North America was reassembled in Cuba: familiar brand names, familiar food, familiar language, and familiar amusements."³⁸ Almost all segments of Cuba's economy began to cater to the tastes of the American tourist trade. Postcards, posters and advertisements were transmitted in American newspapers, magazines and periodicals, in travel articles and tourist books, in travel agencies and airline offices, and promoted Cuba as "paradise on earth".³⁹ Cuba remained both exotic and familiar, 'So Near and Yet so Foreign' (2. 1), a postcard produced by the Cuban Tourist Commission in the 1920s, showed a woman dressed in stereotyped 'Latin' clothing, with a sombrero and rumba rattles. For Americans, Cuba evoked images of romance and sensuousness, Havana was likened to a "woman in love ... eager to give pleasure", as "America's most beautiful mistress". Cuba was the site of sex with women of the Other, the exotic, the mysterious, the primal, the carnal, the passionate, and most explicitly, the racial.

"A woman passes. The hips and high heels are jazz; the arms and breasts swathe her in Andalusian softness; under the blare of her rouge, Africa mumbles."⁴⁰

Concerned with this ascendancy of North American cultural values and products, Cuban writers, poets and artists began to search for ways in which to challenge the transformation of Cuban society. The autochthonous, particularly through its forms in Afro-Cuban music and dance, became written about as the "most essential and characteristic" elements of Cuban nationalism. Increasing references to the prominence of Afro-Cubans within the Cuban cultural landscape began to enter into almost all forms

of artistic production. Much like in the nineteenth century, following writers such as Martí, Afro-Cuban culture in the 1920s and 1930s was engaged in propelling the independent nature of Cuban nationalism. Whereas the nineteenth century precursors endorsed Cuban cultural independence from Spain, in the 1920s and 30s, they were predicated on establishing it from the United States. But the logic under which the representation of Afro-Cubans was taken up by Lam and the *vanguardia* painters perpetuated folkloric conceptions, subordinating their modern function to more 'traditional' and 'mysterious' elements. Afro-Cubanism, particularly as manifested by the *vanguardia* painters, did not reflect a desire to provide more authority or value to Afro-Cubans and their culture, but instead sought to adopt those elements that could conceal and reproduce their function to white, middle-class sensibilities. Afro-Cubanism was

“... the site where men of European and African ancestry rhetorically reconcile[d] their differences and, in the process, [gave] birth to the paternalistic political fiction of a national multiculturalism in the face of a social system that resisted any real structural pluralism.”⁴¹

In reality, the rhetorical construction of Afro-Cuban culture at the service of defining nationalism, particularly in the manifestations of the *vanguardia* artists, served to further entrench racial hierarchies in Cuban society. Afro-Cubans remained passive objects of representation, dispossessed as markers of a white, middle-class conception of nationalism. There were a few exceptions among the *vanguardia* artists, of most note was the Afro-Cuban painter Alberto Peña, whose images stressed the value and contribution of Afro-Cubans to Cuban society.⁴² Rejecting the diminutive folklorised and sexualised representations of Afro-Cubans, Peña perceived his work as a “lively protest against oppression and social injustices.”⁴³ But the artistic commitment of artists such as Peña remained the exception to the dominant means in which Afro-Cuban symbols was adopted.⁴⁴

Nationalism and Afro-Cubanism after the Revolution

These antecedent discussions of race and their place within conceptions of nationalism would not end following the victory of Castro in 1959. A prevailing concern for the Cuban government following its seizure of power in 1959 was to define a new conception of *nationhood*⁴⁵, one that would maintain a significant connection to its predecessors, but that would simultaneously acknowledge the demands of Cuba's new socialist orientation. For the Revolution, in order to establish a cohesive notion Cuban nationhood, it believed that problems of racial discrimination would first need to be addressed through two main factors: cultural and economic.⁴⁶ First all public spaces, including parks, beaches, restaurants and clubs would be remodelled and rebuilt to promote desegregation. This would serve a very practical function for it would allow Afro-Cubans to enjoy their new equal status in very concrete ways, by erasing the "historic geography of race and power"⁴⁷ found in these places. However, more important than this for the government, was addressing the discrimination found in workplaces, since the Revolution needed the labour of all segments of the Cuban population to counter the debilitating effects of the American trade embargo of 1960. In speeches throughout 1959 and 1960, Castro referred to discrimination in employment centres as "hateful and repugnant". Racial discrimination, according to Castro, was antinational, anti-Communist, counterrevolutionary, and akin to pro-Yankee support for imperialism, and ending it became an "ideal" of the new government. To achieve this, new social and economic policies were put into place, regulating discrimination within all public sectors controlled by the government: education, health, employment and cultural recreations. But Castro also recognised that in order to achieve this "ideal", the Revolution would need to use the cultural and religious symbols of Afro-Cubans to reaffirm their commitment to ending discrimination. Between 1959 and 1962, almost all

imagery produced by Cuban governmental agencies made reference to the Revolution's desire to achieve this "ideal". From newspaper and magazine advertisements, to political posters disseminated from various cultural agencies, the discussion of Cuban nationalism would reiterate a commitment to integrating Afro-Cubans into Cuban society at large. Nearly all issues, from promoting education and healthcare, to Castro's anti-American statements, would in some way invoke its link to Cuba's socio-racial concerns: Cubans needed universal access to education, because the Afro-Cuban needed to recognise his potential by providing him with the tools to achieve it; Cubans needed to allow Afro-Cubans more egalitarian employment practices, because Afro-Cubans needed to know that they could do more than shine shoes; and the Cuban government was progressive because it had been able to address an issue that the American government was only beginning to seriously contend with.⁴⁸ Race, in all its forms, would play a significant role in the visual landscape of Cuban art and propaganda during these early years. But by 1962, discussions of Cuban race relations had seemed to disappear. And if one believes the Revolution's propaganda and speeches, this was because the government had eradicated the 'race' problem, and it no longer needed to be discussed.

The method of eradicating racial discrimination in Cuba, while providing tangible effects in the form of physical changes to urban and rural centres, was also conceived metaphorically to predicate a crucial historical reference: the notion of racial and spiritual miscegenation. The appeal towards a racially synthesised population, according to Castro in his speeches, was warranted on one significant concept, that the multiethnic cultural makeup of Cuba's races, instead of creating a fractured populace, produced a unique and particularly Cuban idea of the *same race*. On January 22, 1959, at a conference in Havana, Castro voiced this formulation:

"Latin America would be entirely united in a single force because we have the *same race*, language, feelings."⁴⁹

In a speech to a Havana labour rally in March of the same year, Castro reiterated the place of race as the sole unifying factor in Cuba:

"We all have lighter or darker skin, because lighter skin implied descent from Spaniards who themselves were colonised by the Moors that came from Africa. Those who are more or less dark-skinned came directly from Africa. More over, nobody can consider himself as being of pure, much less superior, race."⁵⁰

The revival of the idea of a *same race* was a particularly complex one in Cuba. The Revolution was the culmination of the efforts of the "26 July Movement", the anti-Batista segment of Havana's intellectual, white middle-class, and Castro was conscious of his inability to alienate this segment of the population whom still controlled most of means of production and who comprised a majority of the urban intellectuals, upon whom the idea of revolution was invested.

"One of the most important things to Castro in his quest for power was to reassure Cuba's upper and middle classes that he shared their cultural and ideological prejudices."⁵¹

Castro was not prepared for the criticism he would receive from the white Cuban middle class, who had the greatest investment in maintaining the class structure that had existed prior to the revolution; a class structure which was at odds with Castro's call for desegregation. While the Revolution could control implementing new cultural and employment policies in public spaces, it would leave the decision of ending discrimination in private spaces up to individual Cubans. Castro claimed in his speeches during these early years that while discrimination was both morally and socially wrong, it would not impede on the private and personal spaces of individual choice. But following the repeated criticism launched at his attempt at resolving Cuba's racial tensions, Castro's position became one of a purely formal condemnation of racial discrimination.⁵² Although Castro refrained from expanding on the precise formulation of 'Cuba's own

roots' and its 'condition', it was immediately evident to those present that this was an encoded reassurance that the revolution shared their (white middle class) cultural and ideological prejudices. Instead of the rhetoric of a "Revolution for all" who belong to the "same race" (Cuban), he proposed what he called a "realistic revolution", which only proposed those things that were attainable. "Together but not mixed up, for everything has its place!" became the revolution's anti-discrimination slogan, and fighting racial discrimination had fallen to fourth in the order of the official revolutionary priorities.⁵³ He stressed the "the Revolution was not going to force anyone to dance with anyone else against his will",⁵⁴ laying the moral responsibility for ending racism in the hands of individual choice. It seemed that he had beaten a hasty retreat on the issue of reconciling discrimination. But it would be in this moment that the rhetorical function of the Afro-Cuban population would begin to gain increasing currency. If there could be not practical end to the ingrained framework of race relations, then there could be a political function to presenting its resolution as a *fait accompli*. The Revolution needed Afro-Cubans to believe in the potential end of racial discrimination, in order for them to actively participate in the new *patria*. This wavering between the focused efforts to discuss the function of race and its place within concepts of the Cuban nation, and the subsequently imposed silence on the conditions of the issue of race, are part of negotiating a complicated new understanding of *patria* in the Revolution. Despite attempts made by the Revolution to present Afro-Cubans with images that endorsed their participation in the new nationhood, many Afro-Cubans' belief in the real potential of ending discrimination remained sceptical. Their ability to congregate in social and political groups had been denied by the middle of the 1960s with official prohibition. While the Revolution argued that the closing of Afro-Cuban societies for allegedly procedural issues such as the lack of proper registration, or the failure to pay fees and taxes, the congregation of groups based on racial criteria was also seen as anti-

productive, and a perpetuation of segregation, resentment and isolation. Even prominent Afro-Cuban professionals and intellectuals criticised the resistance against closing the numerous Afro-Cuban social clubs, newspapers and magazines saying that "racist associations, either of whites or black, should receive no financial support from the revolutionary government for they were all 'anti-Cuban'."⁵⁵ By the middle of the 1960s there were virtually no avenues left for Afro-Cubans to collectively voice their concerns.⁵⁶ "The Revolution's integrationist program left little room for racially defined voices or institutions to persist, much less to thrive."⁵⁷ Instead all cultural production had been placed under strict government control, leaving little if no room for the dissenting voices. In creating a racially desegregated society, the Revolution would feel that it had "given" Afro-Cubans their freedom, and in doing this, it claimed the right of ownership on using the symbols of Afro-Cuban culture and religions in the creation of its new nationhood, a framework, which can only be described as racial paternalism.

Afro-Cubanism: Visual Strategies following the Revolution

Part of the Revolution's commitment to achieving racial synthesis involved the creation of a new visual program that could convey Cubans' desire for desegregation. In 1959 an advertisement appeared in Cuban newspapers that revealed the schematic employed in representing Afro-Cubans and their plight under the Revolution. *Yo Tambien Soy Un Niño* (2.2) was first published in the *M-26-7* daily, and reprinted in *Revolución* on April 2, 1959. The image of a young black boy was set beside a poem that read:

"I don't ask for much. I want to eat, get to know the taste of a pastry. The right to a glass of milk and a little bit of meat every day, to be healthy so, when I grow up, tuberculosis does not consume me. I want to play, to have a tricycle ... to have a new toy. I want to study, to access books and a good school. In order for me to reach all that, it is necessary that my parents have a place to work. They don't want to send me to an institution.

They want to earn what is fair in order to give me food, toys, education, so when I grow up, I can be something besides a shoeshine boy, or a valet. If I become a good man, perhaps my intelligence will generate some respect, and we can all get along and the races will understand each other. Perhaps when I become a man, people will have a clearer idea about life so that when one of my children goes by, instead of saying "there goes a 'negrito'," they will come to say, "there goes a child." Isn't it true that I don't ask for much?"⁵⁸

The central message of this image is clear: while socio-racial tensions would not be eradicated immediately, their erasure would require the participation of all Cubans. Instead of Afro-Cubans asserting their right to equal status, according to this advertisement, they were *asking* for basic necessities such as food, education and work. Afro-Cubans would be freed from their racial repression only by *allowing* the Revolution to use their symbols to speak for them. And in the meantime, while Cuban society was transforming itself into a racial utopia, Afro-Cubans would be required to wait for the benefits promised them in allowing the Revolution to use their image and symbols to promote anti-discriminatory policies. The underlying rhetoric of images such as *Yo Tambien Soy Un Niño*, would become the prevalent means of depicting the Revolution's method of attacking racial discrimination. This paternalistic and benevolent approach to the depiction of Afro-Cubans, and the belief in the national 'ownership' over their symbols, emerged from a desire, on the part of the Revolution, to 'save' the cultural values of Afro-Cubans.

"When a culture is represented as going through *fatal* changes, the natural thing to do is save or salvage it. The 'salvage paradigm' has been exploited in many ways. Predicated on the concept of a dead or dying people while culture needs to be 'saved,' those doing the saving choose what fragments of a culture they will salvage. Having done this, they become both the owners and interpreters of the artefacts or goods that have survived from that dying culture, artefacts that become rare and therefore valuable."⁵⁹

The search for the 'authentic' cultural symbols of Afro-Cubans is a process that according to scholars, precipitates static "essentialist" notions inspiring false the assumption of an authentic self, which is constituted by the value free "dialogical

interaction of the self with other selves." This process of subject formation rests on the assumption that all social and material relations of production are "reduced to the classical split between subject and object."⁶⁰ This method of subject formation, that reduces cultural markers to authentic symbols of social and political processes, engenders homogenous categories that reveal more about the values of the culture producing the categories, than the subject of those categories themselves. This 'tactic of power', maintains an illusory 'pure' Western culture against which the 'authentic' and 'traditional' is reproduced, where a set of subjugating and subjecting strategies perpetuates the structures of alienation imposed by imperialist modes of subjection, establishing a monolithic stable system of power. In Cuba, the prominence of Afro-Cuban symbols within debates of nationalism both before and following 1959, were by no means detached from this function. Despite "centuries of adverse propaganda and degrading stereotyping", Africa, embodied through the Afro-Cuban, "lay powerfully dormant in the psyche of most Cubans."⁶¹ But the use of Afro-Cuban themes and symbols in Cuba, as will become apparent, revealed more about the anxieties and concerns of white, middle-class Cuban values, than they did in representing the social concerns of Afro-Cubans themselves. To advance the salvage of Afro-Cuban culture, in 1962 the Department of Folklore (DOF), and the National Institute of Ethnology and Folklore (NIEF), were established by the Revolution to research the "cultural expressions of the Cuban people and to create a museum of Cuban ethnology." The expressions of the Cuban people, according to these two organisations, would be found in the recovery of Afro-Cuban myths, dance, music, poetry and language. These organisations sought to define the "folkloric" essence of Afro-Cuban culture, and to preserve it, precisely because the Revolution believed they were about to die in the new Cuba. Over the next year these organisations would be entrusted with the responsibility of staging performances and exhibitions of dancers, musicians and practitioners of Santería, that

were devoted to exposing Cubans to the wealth of Afro-Cuban history. In 1964, at the *Festival of Nations* in Paris, a program created by these organisations reflected clearly that “the image that revolutionary Cuba began to export as its own was largely defined by its African ancestry.”⁶²

A 1960 illustration published in *Noticias de Hoy* during Castro's visit to Harlem in that same year showed a black family sharing a meal with Castro, while an image of Abraham Lincoln looked down at them from the wall, with a caption above that read, “We Want Castro!” (2.3) The image was a response to Castro's reception at the United Nations during a visit to Washington in October 1960. Offended by the way he felt the Cuban delegation had been treated, Castro had moved into a hotel in Harlem, a poor black neighbourhood, where the effects of America's racial climate could be acutely felt.⁶³ Here, Castro used the ammunition that Cuba had eradicated segregation, as an attack against United States capitalism. Blacks in America would, according to Castro, always be welcome to Cuba, where they could experience first hand the effects of racial unification. The illustration used Castro's meal with the “poor and humble people of Harlem” as its subject. But the black family in the illustration would simultaneously stand for an Afro-Cuban one, reflecting their desire to also acknowledge Castro as their leader. The method of depicting the black/Afro-Cuban family in *We Want Castro* reveals a horrifying continuation of racial physiognomic stereotyping. Look for example at the figure of the black female serving Fidel Castro. Her facial structure is encoded with signifiers of stereotyped ‘black’ physiognomy, her ‘thick’ lips, ‘black’ skin, and ‘large’ and ‘wide’ nose. The only suggestion of evolution and progress is conveyed through the activities of this family: their relations mimic Western conceptions of familial hierarchies.⁶⁴ In this image, the family's desire for Castro, in place of the democratic-capitalism embodied in the image of Lincoln, metaphorically enacted the desire on the

part of all blacks, Afro-Cubans and African-Americans, to participate in the Revolution's racial paradise. The desire on the part of the black family, according to *We Want Castro*, is not the result of a coercively achieved participatory policy, but one enacted through a desire to 'belong' to the *patria*. In using the slogan "We want Castro", the illustration also made reference to the ensuing riots in Harlem, where police were caught beating Afro-American protestors seeking a glimpse of Castro at the Hotel Theresa. "We want Castro" became, through this incident, a way to take the issue of racial segregation and discrimination into the international arena, it marked the first instance of the internationalising of blackness by the Cuban government. In Harlem, Castro experienced first hand the acumen race could play in placing Cuba within the sphere of international politics. For many Afro-Americans, Castro had become a hero in "America's neglected 'little Africa'"⁶⁵, and the prominence of the incident in international press coverage⁶⁶ only whetted Castro's desire to increase focus on the centrality of eradicating racial tensions, not only in Cuba, but throughout the globe. That race was also a "formidable political weapon to counteract the negative campaign waged by the US mainstream press against the revolutionary government"⁶⁷ was only an additional benefit.

This internationalist stance was advanced in a more concrete way in 1959 and 1960 when the Cuban government launched "Operation Truth" which invited African-American leaders to visit Cuba to witness the eradication of racial tensions. This staged touristic spectacle was a way for the Cuban government to publicly claim Cuba as a "social miracle", achieving conditions in eighteen months that the United States seems unable to do. Socio-racial issues were commodified as spectacles of nationhood. Put onto display by Cuban government officials, Afro-Cuban culture was offered as a way to promote African-American tourism to the island. They served as a monument to the

progressive nature of the Cuban government, and consumed as products of Cuban modernity, where they could provide the experience of “progress consumed as a national spectacle”.⁶⁸ Julian Mayfield, one of the African-American writers invited to the island remarked in 1960

“The important lesson in the Cuban experience, is that great social change need not wait on the patient education of white supremacists [...] Surely a powerful and secure government like that of the US could, if it chose, achieve remarkable results. If the democratic press, of which we boast, needs several generations to achieve what the Cubans have done in 18 months, then there is something wrong with it.”⁶⁹

It seemed that the desired outcome of “Operation Truth” had been achieved: African-American writers and leaders were themselves making comparisons with Cuba and the United States, questioning the very democratic system that had created their conditions of segregation. But if the success of Operation Truth was gauged by these increasing comparisons, the more problematic dimensions of the Harlem incident and its subsequent representation in *We Want Castro* have remained elusive. The representation of the black family in *We Want Castro* in 1960 revealed the method in which Afro-Cubans would be predominately represented in cartoons and illustrations in Cuban newspapers and magazines in the early 1900s. While *Yo Tambien Soy Un Niño* and *We Want Castro* were both responding to the particularities of Cuban politics in the early 1960s, their use of images of Afro-Cubans as part of the national landscape extended narratives already in place in Cuban art prior to the Revolution’s victory, and after 1959, many of these themes and folk types remained part of creating a new Cuban landscape, although subordinated to the specific demands placed on them by the Revolution.

Cuba as ‘Black’

The propulsion of the autochthonous into the international sphere as a symbol of Cuban nationalism was by no means unique to events such as Operation Truth in 1960

or the *Festival of Nations* in 1964. The representation of Cuba through Afro-Cuban folk-types, including the stereotyped 'black' physiognomy of thick lips, dark skin, flat noses, and rounded bodies, would become increasingly prevalent through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and played a significant role in various forms of mass culture, both domestically and internationally. In the late 1890s a series of illustrations were published in several US newspapers representing the relationship between Cuba and the US. The 1899 US war against Spain took form in *This Style of Plaster Will Cure All Their Wounds* (2.4), published in the *Detroit Journal*. The image shows Uncle Sam, the archetypal figure of the US Congress handing money to three black men who stand before a sign that reads "Headquarters Cuban Army." The figures represent Cuban patriots who sided with the US in the conflict, and who subsequently received appropriated funds for agreeing to lay down their weapons. The representation of the Cuban army as thick-lipped, barefoot, lazy, overweight Africans was by no means arbitrary.⁷⁰ During the late nineteenth century, Cuba became the increasing subject of US newspaper illustrations, and almost all representations maintained the widely accepted stereotypes of Blacks as "superstitious, docile, thriftless, emotional, intemperate, unstable, dishonest, promiscuous, happy-go-lucky, and music loving."⁷¹ For the US, the Caribbean countries were characterised by pejorative and patronising representations.

"Before racism as applied to Blacks fell from intellectual respectability, the cartoonists had cast as Black every Caribbean republic, with the possible exception of Costa Rica ... The artists left very little to the imagination as they randomly selected from the long list of physical, oral, and social caricatures with which a prejudiced public could quickly relate. The republics were lampooned variously as cheerful, improvident, carefree Blacks, meant to recall the myth of 'the happy and contented bondsman' or the popular minstrel of an earlier age. In brief, a black face and a foreign dialect symbolically transformed Latin America into stereotype that paralleled the condition of, and evoked from a prejudiced White North American society the same responses as, Blacks in the United States at a time when the prevailing ethic was 'keep them in their place'.⁷²

In illustrations such as *This Style of Plaster*, Cuba became symbolically transformed into irresponsible Blacks whose ailments needed only the infusion of US money to recover. This method of representing Cuba became commonplace in US magazines and journals throughout the early twentieth century, and revealed the racial stereotyping that was predominant among white Americans. In 1902 the *Ohio State Journal* published “Yo’ watch me, chile, mebbe yo’hab a chance yo’se’f some day” (2.5) following the Platt Amendment under President Roosevelt that made Cuba into a quasi protectorate of the US.⁷³ Receiving advice from the ‘Philippines’ over establishing constructive relations with the US, the degenerate status of Cuba, with exaggerated facial features, a sombrero, and a huge cigar, is performatively enacted through the language of the caption. Reduced to addressing ‘Cuba’ in a manner the figure would understand, the ‘Philippines’ borrows vernacular associated with the poor, uneducated Blacks of the southern US. The caricature of Cuba in this manner clearly provided the means through which the representation of Blacks would become encoded with restrictive and problematic associations. The representation of Cuba as Black in this illustration did not imply a celebration of Afro-Cuban or Black culture. It meant instead to signal the negative values associated with blackness; with the primitiveness and backwardness of Blacks; their subordinate position in relation to American culture. This constrictive metaphor of blackness, and its application as a symbol of Cuba, would have been apparent to intellectuals, writers and artists in Cuba. After all, it was not only in US newspapers and illustrations that the representation of caricatured ‘Blacks’ would emerge.

A popular series of *marquillas*, advertisements on tobacco boxes, were produced in the nineteenth century, with reproductions of lithographs by various Cuban artists. Advertising Cuban culture and products, mostly sugar and tobacco, the *marquillas*

reflected the political and social tensions between the Cuban industries during the nineteenth century.

“Not only do these *marquillas* testify to the pervasiveness in the nineteenth-century of the discourse of sugar. They in fact open a new chapter in the complicated history of sugar’s competitive entanglement with tobacco. The discursive intersection of the two economical sectors ... is fraught with fascinating ironies, since the tobacco industry suddenly depicts on its own advertising their most aggressive rival: the sugar plantation.”⁷⁴

Prominently featured on these *marquillas* were representations of blacks and mulattos selling everything from sugar, to skin-whitening powder.⁷⁵ *Agua Florida Para Blanquear la Piel* (2.6), an example of one of the thousands of *marquillas* produced in Cuba, shows the ‘before’ and ‘after’ profile of a “thick-lipped, broad-nosed black dandy whose presumably hilarious offence is to have taken the idea of whitening far too literally.”⁷⁶

The ridiculousness of the African woman’s actions (and perhaps desire) is highlighted by the dramatic change in her skin colouring. As in *Agua Florida Para Blanquear la Piel*, racial stereotyping provided the dominant means through which Afro-Cubans were represented, often in parodic and humorous settings. Many of these advertisements portrayed Afro-Cubans ‘mimicking’ the social behaviours of white middle-class Cubans: attending dances, going for a stroll in the fashionable areas of Havana, dressing in Western clothing, whitening their skin. But these caricatures of Afro-Cubans in these unlikely settings, as Kutzinski points out, involved more than an indirect criticism of the “members of Cuba’s native aristocracy and their own preoccupation with social status.” Their function extended to embed “racial stereotypes in the popular imagination ... substitutes for folklore that developed specifically in urban settings.”⁷⁷

The effects of this method of depicting Cuba, it is prudent to suggest, adds at the very least, a crucial fissure in any conception of a static or stable symbolic function of Afro-Cuban culture, both in these nineteenth century examples, and in those following 1959. These earlier manifestations, both in the US illustrations and the *marquillas*, were

part of the Cuban cultural landscape, and contributed significantly to the plethora of metaphoric meanings encoded in representations of Afro-Cubans and their symbols. These meanings would have continued to reside in subsequent revisions of the place of Afro-Cuban symbols within Cuban culture, whether in the work of the *vanguardia* artists, or in advertisements such as *Yo Tambien Soy Un Niño*. Afro-Cubans symbols would not only been site for the reconciliation of racial and cultural synthesis. Instead, understanding the function of Afro-Cuban images and symbols, and their place within Cuban nationalism, involves an approach that recognises the contradictions and ambiguities encoded in the foreclosure of any cultural sign. In light of this, investigating the function of OSPAAAL's adoption of African elements suggests at the very least a continuation of these remnant racialised meanings. But placed within their moment of production in the late 1960s, the metaphors used in OSPAAAL's posters were also tied to the specificities of the moment of their production. How then did these meanings of 'blackness' translate into OSPAAAL's posters?

Notes to Chapter One:

1 Homi K. Bhabha *Nation and Narration* (New York: Routledge, 1990): 4

2 Ibid., p 292

3 Ibid., p 4

4 Benedict Anderson p47

5 Vera Kutzinski discusses this in her book *Sugar's Secrets*. P7

6 Most artistic production by Afro-Cuban writers and artists during the nineteenth century was seen as folkloric and denied any real critical potential. Although it is impossible to conclude the precise numbers of Afro-Cuban artists involved in the arts, most Cuban art exhibited in international exhibitions was produced by Cubans of European descent. In the early twentieth century, artists such as Wilfredo Lam, Alberto Peña, Teodoro Ramos Blanco and Andrés Álvarez Naranjo of mixed racial heritage began to receive national and international recognition for their avant garde paintings and sculptures. See Luis Camnitzer *New Art of Cuba* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), de la Fuente also discusses the emergence of this group of Afro-Cuban artists in the 1920s. It will be discussed further in chapter two.

7 Cuba became a Spanish colony in 1492, and for the most part remained so until the first attempts towards independence by the Cubans in the 1820s. In 1823 Cuban poet José María Heredia and José Francisco Lemus organized a secret society known as "Suns and Rays of Bolívar" and planned a rebellion for independence. In 1825 the governments of Mexico and Venezuela planned an expedition to Cuba in order to help the struggle for independence. But the United States, fearing an independent Cuba would lead to the end of slavery with repercussions in the Southern states, let it be known through Secretary of State Henry Clay that it would block any move to liberate Cuba from Spain. In 1866, fearing the handover of Cuba from the Spanish to the U.S., José Martí warned Cubans that "to change masters is not to be free." Following the dethroning of Spanish Queen Isabelle II in 1868, Cuban efforts towards independence began to intensify. Over the next ten years numerous insurgencies were attempted by groups of revolutionary Cubans, ending in a truce in May 1878. The first constitution of an independent Cuban state was declared on January 30, 1901. The document was modeled on the U.S. Constitution, and put forward a government that consisted of legislative, executive, and judicial branches, a president and Vice-President, a Congress composed of a Senate and a House of Representatives and a Supreme Court. The President and Vice-President were to be elected for four years by popular vote. While this marked the end of the Cuban-Spanish conflict, it began a new phase in the definition of an independent Cuban state. Following 1901, defining the newly created nation of Cuba would involve a negotiation between populations descended from Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe. For detailed discussions see Luis A Pérez Jr. *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality & Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Alejandro de la Fuente *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Luis Martínez-Fernández *Torn Between Empires: Economy, Society, and patterns of political through in the Hispanic Caribbean, 1840-1878* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994); Rafael E Tarragó *Experiencias Políticas de los Cubanos en la Cuba Española* (Barcelona: Puvill Libros, 1996)

8 Luis A Pérez Jr. *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality & Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999) 85

9 Ibid. p85 Pérez quotes Enrique Joé Varona from "Cuba y sus juices" *Revista Cubana* 6 (September 1887): 276 "The Cuban possesses characteristics that denote progress within his lineage (raza), and if he is not absolutely more intelligent than the Spaniard, he is certainly of quicker comprehension and less resistant to change ... He is more open, more modern, more cosmopolitan ... The Spaniard is ill-prepared for the higher necessities of civilisation."

10 "Cuba and Cubanness were represented in vastly different ways in 1899, when the defeated Spain had to relinquish sovereignty over its Caribbean colony. Despite their difference, all these definitions had a common element: the shared belief that "race" was at the very core of the nation." de la Fuente: 23

11 The use of the term *mestizaje* refers to a political and social ideology produced by nationalist intellectuals who formed the Afrocubanista cultural movement in the late 1920s. It was a "reformulation of the nationalist myth of racial equality [that took] Martí's notion of Cubanness one

step further, inventing a synthesis that proudly proclaimed miscegenation to be the very essence of the nation – a mulatto "Cuban race". de la Fuente:15

12 Although Ortiz credits Antonio de Veitia with the first use of the phrase "Afro-Cuban" in 1847. However its incorporation into common place usage is credited to Ortiz.

13 Ortiz "On the Relations Between Blacks and Whites" (1943):1-4

14 Ibid., p5

15 Vera Kutzinski *Sugar's Secrets: Race and the Erotics of Cuban Nationalism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993):5

16 Fernando Ortiz "Los últimos versos mulattos" *Revista Bimestre Cubana* 35 (1935) 322

17 Fernando Ortiz *Los Bailes y el Teatro de los Negros en el folklore de Cuba* (Habana, Ministerio de Educación, Dirección de Cultura, 1951)

18 Mosquera 'Modernidad y Africa: Wilfredo Lam in his Island' p49

19 But Ortiz's theses once again overlooked the realities of colour differences in an attempt to promote a racially harmonious nation, or as Cuban art critic Gerardo Mosquera points out: "... in addition to the gravy of synthesis, the bones and hard flesh which never dissolve are left behind, despite their substantial contribution to the flavour." Ibid., p49

20 Nationalism was also conveyed through the representation of landscape and environment. Narciso G. Menocal "An Overriding Passion: The Quest for a National Identity in Painting." *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 22(Boston: MIT Press, 1996): 191

21 "Ésa de racista está siendo una palabra confusa y hay que ponerla en claro. El hombre no tiene ningún derecho especial porque pertenezca a una raza o a otra: dígame hombre, y ya se dicen todos los derechos. El negro, por negro, no es inferior ni superior a ningún otro hombre; peca por redundante el blanco que dice: "Mi raza"; peca por redundante el negro que dice: "Mi raza". Todo lo que divide a los hombres, todo lo que especifica, aparta o acorralla es un pecado contra la humanidad. ¿A qué blanco sensato le ocurre envanecerse de ser blanco, y qué piensan los negros del blanco que se envanece de serlo y cree que tiene derechos especiales por serlo? ¿Qué han de pensar los blancos del negro que se envanece de su color? Insistir en las divisiones de raza, en las diferencias de raza, de un pueblo naturalmente dividido, es dificultar la ventura pública y la individual, que están en el mayor acercamiento de los factores que han de vivir en común. Si se dice que en el negro no hay culpa aborigen ni virus que lo inhabilite para desenvolver toda su alma de hombre, se dice la verdad, y ha de decirse y demostrarse, porque la injusticia de este mundo es mucha, y es mucha la ignorancia que pasa por sabiduría, y aún hay quien crea de buena fe al negro incapaz de la inteligencia y corazón del blanco; y si a esa defensa de la naturaleza se la llama racismo, no importa que se la llame así, porque no es más que decoro natural y voz que clama del pecho del hombre por la paz y la vida del país. Si se aleja de la condición de esclavitud, no acusa inferioridad la raza esclava, puesto que los galos blancos, de ojos azules y cabellos de oro, se vendieron como siervos, con la argolla al cuello, en los mercados de Roma; eso es racismo bueno, porque es pura justicia y ayuda a quitar prejuicios al blanco ignorante. Pero ahí acaba el racismo justo, que es el derecho del negro a mantener y a probar que su color no le priva de ninguna de las capacidades y derechos de la especie humana." Excerpt from Jose Martí "Mi Raza" *Patria*, New York, 16 de abril de 1893 reprint from <http://www.josemarti.org/temas/obras/articulosvarios/miraza.htm>

22 Gerardo Mosquera 'Modernidad y Africa: Wilfredo Lam in his Island', *Third Text* n20 (Autumn 1992): 42-68

23 "The spectacle appears at once as society itself, as a part of society and as a means of unification. As a part of society, it is that sector where all attention, all consciousness, converges. [...] The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images. [...] The spectacle cannot be understood either as a deliberate distortion of the visual world or as a product of the technology of the mass dissemination of images. It is far better viewed as a *weltanschauung* that has been actualized, translated into the material realm – a world view transformed into an objective force." Guy Debord *Society of the Spectacle* (New York : Zone Books, 1994): 12-13 The use of Afro-Cuban symbols as cultural capital will be investigated further in chapters one and three.

24 Kutzinski p48

25 The influence of the Generation of 1927 is discussed by Camnitzer pp102-109; David Craven *Art and Revolution in Latin America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002) pp107-110

26 de la Fuente p183

27 Juan A. Martínez *Cuban Art and National Identity: The Vanguardia Painters, 1927-1950* (New York: Arno Press, 1994) pp74-81

28 *Ibid.*, p201

29 de la Fuente p182

30 Fernando Ortiz "Más acerca de la poesía mulata" reprint in de la Fuente p182

31 André Breton "Interview with René Balence" (1945) in Franklin Rosemont, ed., *What Is Surrealism?* (New York, 1978) p256

32 Gerardo Mosquera 'Modernidad y Africa: Wilfredo Lam in his Island', *Third Text* n20 (Autumn 1992):45

33 Wilfredo Lam "Statement" (1975) in Dore Ashton ed., *Artists on Art* (New York, 1983) p118

34 Pérez "Travel to Cuba began slowly and increased steadily, from nearly 33,000 visitors in 1914 ... to between 1920 and 1940 more than two million U.S. tourists visited Cuba." p167

35 Pérez p169

36 *Ibid.*, p173

37 *Ibid.*, p187

38 *Ibid.* p169

39 Cuba also became the setting for numerous film productions between 1930 and 1950. The *Girl from Havana* (1929), *Under Cuban Skies* (1930), *Cuban Love Song* (1931), *Havana Widows* (1933), *Weekend in Havana* (1941), *Moonlight in Havana* (1942), *Club Havana* (1946) and *Havana Rose* (1951) are among the many that imagined and celebrated the fantastic, exotic and sexual nature of Cuba. See Pérez for a detailed discussion of this pp180-83

40 Waldo Frank, travel writer reprint in Pérez p190

41 Kutzinski p12

42 de la Fuente "It is an alternative representation in which the nation is identified with the most humble among the humble: manual workers, the unemployed, and peasants." p185

43 Martínez p85

44 Another Afro-Cuban artist who was seen as mounting a challenge to the ideology of the *vanguardia* artists was sculptor Teodoro Ramos Blanco. Ramos Blanco's work celebrated blackness as "beauty, screams, rebelliousness, and pain" through the representation of Afro-Cuban heroes such as Juan Gualberto Gómez and Mariana Granjales. "... what was truly unique about Ramos Blanco was that he proudly displayed his blackness as a symbol of dignity and rebelliousness." de la Fuente p185

45 I have chosen to use the words nationhood and patria as a way to reference constructs of the Cuban nation following 1959. Since the first writings on Cuban nationalism, numerous linguistic terms have been applied, each with a particular usage and social function. "Cubanidad", "cubanía", and "lo cubano" were among the first manifestations of this, emerging in the nineteenth century, the terms were an attempt by writers to reference Cuban nationalism by rescuing popular and colloquial expression already in place in Cuban society. In the 1920s and 30s Jorge Mañach's *Indagación del choteo* (1928) identified Cuban culture with the concept of the *lo cubano*. It was characterised by light-heartedness, trust, a preference for small groups, familiarity, indiscipline, improvisation, comradeship and egalitarianism. It "articulated the paradoxes of Cuba's nationalist intelligentsia during the first half of the twentieth century: anti imperialist but elitist, reformist but paternalistic, illustrated but frustrated in its ambition to lead the nation. The term "Cubanidad" was taken up in the early twentieth century to designate "the junction of nationality and citizenship" by writers both on the island and in exile. The term "cubanía" suggests a greater political orientation in the conception of nationhood. Fernando Ortiz was one of the first to use this term to describe a consciously adopted and desired nationalism. "Lo Cubano" has been the term most commonly used in the contemporary investigations of Cuban culture, perhaps because its gender 'neutrality' is seen in some way to translate into a linguistic neutrality, where monolithic conceptions of unity are criticised in favour of questioning social and political tensions. See Damián J. Fernandez and Madeline Cámara Betancourt eds., *Cuba, the Elusive Nation: Interpretations of National Identity* (Gainesville: University Press of

Florida, 2000), in particular Jorge Duany "Reconstructing Cubanness: Changing Discourses of National Identity on the Island and in the Diaspora during the Twentieth Century" pp17-42; Ada Ferrer "Rethinking Race and Nation in Cuba" pp60-76; Damián J. Fernandez "Cuba and lo Cubano, or the Story of Desire and Disenchantment" pp79-99

46 "I believe it is my duty to tell the people about the things on my mind and how they must collaborate with their revolutionary government and how it is helping them. (Passage indistinct). But not everybody's mentality has developed enough in the revolutionary way; a revolutionary consciousness is lagging behind the people's feelings. The people's feelings are all revolutionary, but their mentality is still not wholly so. The people's mentality is conditioned by many inherited prejudices, many vestiges of the past, and many old customs. If the people want to overcome this evil they must begin by recognizing it. If the people want to see a correct course for themselves they must accept the postulates I was talking about. (I told?) that battles must be won by us and in that order they must be won; the battle against unemployment; the battle to raise the standards of the lowest paid workers; the battle to bring down the cost of living; and one of the most just battles that must be fought, a battle that must be emphasized more and more, which I might call the fourth battle--the battle to end racial discrimination at work centers. I repeat: the battle to end racial discrimination at work centers. Of all forms of racial discrimination the worst is the one that limits the colored Cuban's access to jobs. It is true that there (exists?) in our country in some sectors the shameful procedure of barring Negroes from jobs." Fidel Castro, *March 23, 1959 Speech at Havana Labor Rally*, reprint from "Castro Speech Database" (<http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro.html>)

47 Ibid., p269

48 See de la Fuente pp259-315; Pérez Jr pp16-95; Moore pp1-53; Ruth Reitan *The Rise and Decline of an Alliance: Cuba and African American Leaders in the 1960s* (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1999)

49 (Lockwood 160/161)

50 Fidel Castro, March 23, 1959 Speech at Havana Labor Rally reprint in Moore p20

51 Carlos Moore p7

52 In February, *Revolución*, the publication of Castro's Movimiento 26 de Julio, conducted a survey of among Afro-Cubans. The results contradicted Castro's appraisal that racism was not only manageable, but also on its way out. The survey found that racism was not the "latent phenomenon" proclaimed by Castro's speeches, but a "veritable plague on the black population".⁵² But the survey also showed the confidence among the Afro-Cuban population that the revolution would not only do away with racism, it would also allow the Black population to claim equal status economically, socially, and politically, within the new regime. Despite the fact that nearly two months after his victory, the racial question had remained virtually unanswered and the Afro-Cubans continued to have no voice within the predominately Hispanic makeup of the Cuban state. The rhetoric had switched to a promotion of assimilation into white culture. "Neither Black, Nor Red!" the slogan of the white middle-class Cubans now became the rhetoric of official policy.

53 Moore 22

54 Fidel Castro speech on 22 March 1959, quoted in Carlos Moore p22

55 Manuel Cuéllar in a report to the Forum about racist Discrimination held at the University of Havana in April, 1959. reprinted in de la Fuente p282

⁵⁶ When Cuba claimed its independence in 1901, the ideal of a racially integrated and harmonious nation had not yet been achieved. But the legitimacy of the idea itself was so powerful that it would remain a vital symbol of the new Cuban state. It seemed that although Afro-Cubans lacked access to avenues for real social and political action, the ideal of integration itself remained seductive. Seeking methods to alter their subordinate position, soon after independence, Afro-Cubans began to form underground societies and parties to assess their political and social roles in Cuban society. Angered by their continued disenfranchisement, Afro-Cuban writers began to call for greater agency and access to cultural and political opportunities. Resistance to racial segregation peaked in 1912 when hundreds of Afro-Cubans, members of a political party called the Direction Central de Sociedades de Color, massed on the 10th anniversary of Cuba's independence to protest the lack of racial equality⁵⁶. The ensuing massacre, some have argued, provided the seeds for the

massive Afro-Cuban support Fidel Castro would receive in 1959. Following 1912, it became clear to Afro-Cubans that their obsequious position had been secured in almost all spheres of Cuban society. January 30, 1901 the Constitution of the Republic of Cuba was published. It defined the makeup of the government. See J.A. Sierra *The Timetable History of Cuba* (<http://www.historyofcuba.com/history/time/timetbl2c.htm>)

57 de la Fuente p280

58 translation in de la Fuente

59 Marcia Crosby "The Construction of the Imaginary Indian" Stan Douglas ed. *Vancouver Anthology: The Institutional Politics of Art* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1991) p274

60 Gayatri Spivak "The Politics of Interpretation" *In Other Words: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1988) p119

61 Moore p96

62 Martínez Furé, Conjunto Folklórico Nacional, and 'Obra de fundación,' in *Diálogos imaginarios* 248-56, English translation in de la Fuente p290 Between 1969 and 1972 Cuba participated in various international exhibitions including the "cultural Olympics of Mexico, the Tokyo Biennale of Plastic Arts Festival, the Triennale Graphic Exhibition of Sweden, the Inter-graphic Exhibition in Berlin, the International Ballet Festival in Varna, the Fifth National Humorists Salon of Canada, and the Triennale Exhibition of Ingenuous Art in Bratislava." See Lisandro Otero "Antecedents and origins of Cuban culture" *Cultural Policy in Cuba* (1972) p33-35

63 The United States believed that Cuban President Osvaldo Dorticós Torrado would be heading Cuba's delegation to the United Nations in New York. Instead, Castro's arrival caught Washington off guard, and the Cuban delegation was immediately put under restrictive activities. According to Moore, "everything indicated a concerted effort to humiliate, harass, and discredit Castro and his delegation." p78 Despite Castro's repeated protests to the UN Secretary General, he felt that no attempt was being made to rectify the situation. Realising the potential for the situation to embarrass both the US and the UN, Castro moved himself and his delegation into Harlem, the US' largest black ghetto. The incident became an important social stimulus, thousands of Afro-Americans began to block the streets of Harlem. See Moore pp 78-81

64 "The Family of Man was itself confirmed through ubiquitous metaphoric analogies with science and biology. Bolstered by pseudo-scientific racism after the 1850s and commodity racism after the 1880s, the monogamous patriarchal family, headed by a single, white father, was vaunted as a biological fact, natural, inevitable and right, its lineage imprinted immemorably in the blood of the species – during the same era, one might add, when the social functions of the family household were being replaced by the bureaucratic state." McClintock p56

65 Moore p79 According to de la Fuente, Castro "asserted that in Harlem he felt like he was in his own country, adding that the Cuban delegation had been discriminated against in midtown Manhattan." p297

66 The Cuban press also began to run stories calling attention to the government's commitment to ending racial discrimination. "Cuban propaganda emphasized the racial integration of the revolutionary island, and the contrast with previous regimes, under which Negroes had been effectively excluded ... Mass rallies were convened throughout Cuba by the labour unions, the Cuban Communist party, and the Movimiento 26 de Julio to denounce the Ku Klux Klan and American racism. Cuban radio, television, and newspapers produced stories of the New York police beating Blacks near the Hotel Theresa for shouting 'We want Castro!' A rally of one million Cubans was called together in Havana to protest 'the discrimination against Fidel' which was likened to that practiced against US Blacks and black Cubans prior to the Revolution." Moore p79

67 de la Fuente p296

68 McClintock p59 discusses the way in which the Great Exhibition of 1851 at the Crystal Palace in London's Hyde Park presented examples of cultures from around the world. McClintock argues that the Exhibition was staged to promote imperialist aspirations by encouraging visitors to feel pride in the progress of their nation. "Implicit in the Exhibition was the new experience of imperial progress consumed as a national spectacle."

69 Mayfield 'Cuba has a Solution' in Van Gosse "The African-American Press Greets the Cuban Revolution" in *Between Race and Empire: African-Americans and Cubans before the Cuban Revolution* p271

70 "Once the troops were landed in Cuba, United States officers quickly concluded that Spanish officers were far more honorable and civilized than the patriots, whose treatment of prisoners and Spanish sympathizers was views as savage and barbaric. The officers' convictions were soon reflected in the United States news media." John J. Johnson *Latin America in Caricature* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980):164

71 Ibid., p157

72 Ibid., p158

73 The Platt Amendment gave the US the "right to intervene for the preservation of Cuban independence, the maintenance of a government adequate for the protection of life, property and individual liberty." The Platt Amendment became an appendix to the Cuban constitution which became law on June 12, 1901 Lester A. Sobel ed. *Castro's Cuba in the 1970s*. New York: Facts on File, 1978

74 Ibid., p47

75 For a detailed discussion of the *marquillas* see Kutzinski "Caramel Candy for Sale" pp43-80 Images included Cuban landscapes, comedic sketches with mulattos, Afro-Cuban dances, and in their later manifestations, racially mixed liaisons.

76 Kutzinski p58

77 Ibid. p59

Chapter Two

The Cuban Poster: A Study in Internationalism

"Cuba felt independent enough to culturally absorb any style, however closely associated with the advanced bourgeois societies which had rejected Cuba, and which in turn Cuba had rejected. The nation was strong enough to turn upon the enemy, the enemy's own cultural weapons, selectively adapting styles, and reusing content in satiric rebuttal."¹

The "Social" Function of Cuban Art

Cuban art production during the 1960s was predicated on one crucial aesthetic premise: that it was the product of dynamic hybridisation. According to art critic Gerardo Mosquera,

"Cuban culture is 'multatto' in many of its forms, it is a product of dynamic hybridisation [*mestizaje*], under specific historical and social condition, of seeds from the West and the non-West."²

This hybridisation was seen by Mosquera as one of the Revolution's greatest achievements, disclosed primarily through the significant numbers of Cubans attending artistic events and participating in cultural activities. Mosquera's use of the notion of hybridisation referred to more than the adaptation of Western and non-Western aesthetic forms, but also indexed the arrival of a "hybrid national synthesis of international significance."³ The concept of a 'hybrid national synthesis' referred explicitly to the ability of artistic production to reflect the *mulattohood* of Cuban society, and was most succinctly revealed through the use of references and symbols of the Afro-Cuban population. The prominence of these forms in Cuban art had already been well established through the nineteenth and twentieth century antecedents discussed in the previous chapter. For Mosquera, the use of a hybridised visual language, both in its adoption of multiple Western aesthetic forms, and its combination with 'indigenous' Afro-

Cuban references, produced a style that could serve two important functions. First was its ability to promote what Cubans called “cultural democracy”: a commitment by the Revolution to socialise artistic practice in an effort to create a more participatory and self-conscious populace.⁴ The program of socialisation sought a reorienting of art to its service within the Revolution, as a means to structure all aspects of life “simultaneous with the political, social and economic revolution.”⁵ This socialisation of art was seen as a step towards the dismantling of old notions of “bourgeois” art that maintained division between elite “high” culture and mass “low” culture. But instead of producing a ‘revolution’ in art, artists in Cuba conceived of a much slower process, where transformation began at the ‘material base’ of Cuban culture and produced a new social reality. Through a nationwide program, the “Movimiento de Aficionados”, the Cuban government committed to increasing audiences for the arts and expanding the number of people actively engaged in artistic production.

“Above all, changes in the social function of the visual arts developed within the Revolution have been of a quantitative nature. There are more people making art; more people learning to make it; there are more museums, more galleries, more (perhaps too many) events; but the type of artistic activity within society continues being in its *functional aspect* the same, in large measure ... functionality within the framework of a socialist country where the alienation and mercantilist mechanisms of capitalism have disappeared (although at this time maintaining market exchange *saque la pezuña*).”⁶

For the Revolution, this process of cultural democracy was seen as a way to educate and develop Cubans’ understanding of art, as a way to convey the social and political importance of Cuban cultural production. And one of the essential ideas that the Revolution wanted to convey was the multiplicity of its cultural and racial heritage. One way to achieve this, the Revolution felt, was to produce a style that would itself reflect the hybridised conditions of Cuba’s cultural makeup.⁷ To this end, the Revolution felt, artists would be allowed freedom to choose the artistic styles necessary, confined to only

one requirement, that they maintain a practice committed to help search and define the nationalist identity of Cuba.

“Again, Cuban artists looked for international trends to help define national identity, and the blend of conditions created an art form peculiarly appropriate to the times in Cuba, with the stylistic consistency, elegance, and directness that characterised the Cuban poster of the period.”⁸

Allowing independent artistic freedom also circumvented any criticism launched at the Revolution’s dogmatism. But rather than concluding, as Luis Camnitzer does, that Cuban posters should be seen as a “spontaneous and organic development, not as evidence of any public policy or self-imposed artistic canon,”⁹ the adoption of international aesthetic form, I argue, served a second, and perhaps most crucial function. It allowed the Cuban poster to reach audiences internationally, particularly in Europe and North America, where a burgeoning youth culture was rapidly making its discontent over spreading capitalist hegemony known.

The posters dedicated to solidarity with African nations would dominate OSPAAAL’s efforts in the years immediately following its inception, dedicated to efforts in Angola, the Congo, Zimbabwe, Egypt, Ethiopia, Guinea Bissau, South Africa, Mozambique, Namibia and many others. With their adaptations of European and North American avant-garde and modernist aesthetics, they would become one of the most popular forms of art production under Castro’s new government. Poster production in Cuba reached its height between 1967 and 1970, with nearly five million being produced by 1972.¹⁰ The posters were folded and placed into *Tricontinental*, which was, by 1970, printing fifty thousand copies,¹¹ and despite the US embargo of 1960, shipping copies to subscribers and progressive bookstores across Europe and the United States. The magazine was eagerly sought after, and with its publication in four languages, French, Spanish, English and Arabic, it reached eighty-seven different countries. Published in

editions of 2,000-2,500, the posters were kept relatively small and uniform in size (53 x33 cm) until the middle of the 1970s when larger formats began to emerge. It should not be surprising that in the conception of OSPAAAL's tasks, the Revolution would begin to sponsor the production and dissemination of posters. Following in the examples set by the Soviets under Josef Stalin and Vladimir Lenin, and the Chinese under Mao Tse-Tsung, Castro recognised the importance of simultaneously affecting the seizure of power, and the seizure of meaning.¹² For the Soviet and Chinese revolutions, 'meaning' was aimed at redefining all social values, by introducing the symbols and traditions of the new regime. Defining these new symbols and traditions would, for the Chinese and Soviet revolutions, denote the creation of a new culture, one that emerged naturally from its revolutionary nature. To this end, both the Soviets and Chinese developed a highly complex propaganda machine, and used films, posters and newspapers to clarify the cultural makeup of the revolution. Directed at their local populations, the advanced mechanisms of these propaganda machines were meant to address the high levels of illiteracy within the populations, using film and posters at the service of revolutionary indoctrination. Cheap to produce and easy to disseminate, posters quickly became the preferred mode of visual representation for both countries. Not only were posters visually arresting, but their ability to traverse all aspects of public space, both physically and discursively, made them one of the most effective tools of propaganda for the Chinese and Soviets. The Chinese Communist Party's posters showing revolutionary model behaviour, were echoed in the Soviet representations of collectivisation; both propagating a transformation in mass consciousness. By the 1960s it was undeniable that in the effort towards mass indoctrination, both the Soviet and Chinese models of agitprop had proven successful. Their utilisation of all aspects of cultural production and consumption at the service of new party politics provided a model that could easily be adopted by other countries also witnessing the emergence of Socialism and

Communism. But OSPAAAL's artists consciously rejected these earlier models. Socialist Realism did not seem to provide the new government with the appropriate language for its Revolution. The image of the heroic worker, the revolting peasant and the fighting intellectual were seen by Cuban artists as stagnating metaphors of revolutions whose participation on an international stage was excluded by their self imposed isolationist stance. Cuban artists recognised that adopting the artistic languages of these revolutions would be akin to pronouncing complete political and economic allegiance with China and the Soviet Union. They felt that the didacticism of the Soviet and Chinese examples would not provide the means in which to convey the unique conditions of Cuba. Instead, the concept of hybridisation would be put forward as a style appropriate to reflecting the particularities of Cuban culture.

In order to understand some of the discursive functions of OSPAAAL's posters, it is important to navigate the avenues through which it was distributed. In addition to its appearance in the streets of Cuban cities and towns, the posters were also mounted onto special stands, reproduced in books, magazines, and placed onto billboards throughout Cuba.

"Public space as a locus for political debate involving provocative images about the general welfare or international solidarity was as common in Cuba after 1960 as it was uncommon in the United States."¹³

But unlike the commodity function manifested in the Western posters, according to Susan Sontag, the Cuban poster was not intended to isolate an 'individual' consumer, for whom the freedom of expression directly correlated his capacity to consume. Rather, as Sontag and David Craven point out, OSPAAAL's poster, at least in their domestic function, were meant to "initiate a dialogue with interdependent subjects who consciously acted in relation to others..."¹⁴ This after all was the primary motivation behind the Revolution's drive towards cultural democracy. However analyses such as

these tend to construct Cuban populace as a homogenous category, unified by their “free choices [that] were replete with serious implications for humanity in general.”

“[T]he Cuban poster overtly contested the ideology of mere personal gain by the very way it refused to present ideas and images outside a system of value mediated by ideology on various levels and intimately linked to an individual choice free of serious implications for others.”¹⁵

This conclusion would not perhaps be critical, if it didn't present the conception of “ideology on various levels” as a sufficiently heterogeneous category. Cuban publics were not the homogenous, unified category put forward by Craven, Sontag, and many other scholars of Cuban poster art. In large part a reflection of the racial and economic conditions in the 1960s, Cuba's population continued to maintain complicated social divisions. The ‘public’ in Cuba, was as contested a notion, as was the conception of *mulathood* in discourses of nationalism. Which ‘public’ did OSPAAAL's posters intend to educate and socialise? The answer to this remains rooted in the posters domestic/internationalist matrix. While OSPAAAL's posters were a definitive part of the urban visual landscape in Cuba, the artists also recognised the need for them to function simultaneously in a global artistic sphere. In the 1960s, particular shifts in social and economic conditions created a climate ideal for the emergence of a distinct new sub-culture in Europe and North America. Known as the ‘youth culture’, it encompassed a post-war phenomenon that saw the rapid growth, both demographically and financially, of teenagers and young adults between the ages of fifteen and thirty. The expansion of the leisure market was seen as perhaps the most important shift towards the growth of the youth culture. Goods were created and targeted specifically to youth. Simultaneous to this growing market, youth had access to capital as never before. This increasing ability to access and purchase goods created specifically for this newly defined segment allowed for the creation of collective patterns of consumption and distribution: and goods created for the youth culture were immediately identifiable as “unique”. Coupled with the

arrival and rise of mass communication, including radio, television and publishing, the export of iconic cultural forms, The Beatles and Andy Warhol among the multitude, expressed its influence through imitation and manipulation. Youth were able to access new forms of material culture and adopt them as expressions of solidarity. Standing as metaphors for the determinants of their insubordinate status, these new goods represented the deviant and resistive nature of the sub-group. Music, literature, movies and clothing became the visual manifestations of shared political and social concerns. The artists of OSPAAAL recognised these rapid shifts and sought to capitalise upon the growing affluence of the new youth culture. Both in their access to the means of consumption, as well as with their disillusionment of increasing global capitalism, the youth culture seemed to present itself as the most apparent and receptive international audience. The rhetoric of solidarity would hold great appeal to a youth culture that was already defined by the idea of "imitative solidarity". The mass consumption of goods created for the youth market sold with it the rhetoric of resistance. Clothing marked out one's political and social affiliations; and music and art, by extension of this culture, became its new slogans.

The "Styles"

In order to access this sub-culture, OSPAAAL's artists looked to produce a visual style that would be both familiar and appealing to them. Solidarity needed to be conveyed, not only through elements that would remain uniquely 'Cuban', but also through a form that would be instantly recognisable to this new audience. What emerged, in large part a reflection of the internationalist education of OSPAAAL's artists, was a blend of Western aesthetic forms, with autochthonous references to African symbols. The desire of OSPAAAL's artists to design a visual language that embodied the synthesis of Afro-Cuban culture with international concerns, revealed a "self-

conscious conjuncture of Afro-American, Indo-American, and Euro-American traditions.”¹⁶ Attempting to categorise the various styles adopted is impossible as they are “so variegated as to make identification of general traits hardly possible, save for their diversity.”¹⁷ Despite this plurality in form, they marked a consistent commitment to support of national liberation, and youth revolutionary movements around the world. By taking up elements from Pop Art, Op Art, Minimalism, Abstract Expressionism, Conceptualism, Cubist Collage, Constructivist Montage and Surrealism and blending them with the icons, forms, lines and perspectives of more “traditional” forms of African and Latin American sculpture, masks, paintings and iconography, OSPAAAL’s artists were able to circumvent the earlier models of the Russian and Chinese revolutions.

“We are also part of the West, geographically and culturally, [and] we should not shut ourselves off from the rest of the world behind a border. We wage our cultural battle based on the principles that inspired Western culture, and on its universal aspirations ... We don’t forget that, and we are willing to wage our own battles within that culture’s tradition of struggle.”¹⁸

They would be able to create a truly international language that would historically link Cuba’s rich artistic lineage to an international stage, signalling Cuba as a country simultaneously existing between the cultural boundaries of Europe, Latin America, Africa and North America.

“In turn, the very catholicity of Cuban poster design was interrelation not only with the resolutely internationalist aims for which they were produced, but also with the hybrid, multicultural aesthetic that the revolutionary process was committed to consolidating.”¹⁹

Or as Kunzle puts it, “[t]he culture of present-day Cuba, is in significant areas a part—legacy of the Europeanised and North Americanised past purified, rejuvenated and reoriented by socialist values and a new internationalism.”²⁰ The Revolution and its artists were cautious to completely reject their European and North American artistic lineages in favour of an exclusively ‘traditional’ visual language. After all, Cuba’s artistic climate during the Revolution was indebted to decades of exchanges and influences

from European and North American Modernist traditions. This new hybrid form would reflect the multicultural hybridization the government was attempting to consolidate within the Revolution²¹, but would refrain from detaching itself completely from Cuba's artistic roots. This was in large part a result of the artists charged with the production of OSPAAAL's posters.

In the 1960s most of OSPAAAL's posters were produced by well known contemporary Cuban artists and graphic designers. Many of these artists, who also worked for Cuba's other cultural agencies²², had succeeded in achieving critical success during the 1940s and 50s, both in Cuba and internationally. Raúl Martínez, a member of Cuba's abstract-expressionist group "Los Once" during the 1950s, was an example of the calibre of OSPAAAL's artists. Los Once aspired to "painterly painting" without any focus on subject or literature. One of Cuba's most active groups of artists, Los Once's exhibition in Havana in 1956 was seen as a seminal part of the development of Cuba's Modernist tradition.²³ Martínez had spent a year in 1952 studying design at the Art Institute of Chicago, and after the Revolution he continued to develop many of the styles he had been exposed to there. In addition to his work for OSPAAAL, Martínez continued to maintain an independent artistic practice following 1959, developing techniques reminiscent of Robert Rauschenberg's collages. Martínez was by no means the only artist working for OSPAAAL that continued to produce work within both realms of the Cuban art system. Alfredo Rostgaard, who was famous for his iconic images of Che, was also Director of the organisation through the 1960s. For Rostgaard, OSPAAAL's posters needed to avoid the rigidity of socialist realism "the Polish artists showed us that we could make completely political posters for the First of May or the anniversary of the October Revolution, with poetry, with beauty, with an indirect language."²⁴ Elena Serrano, René Mederos, Faustino, Mario Sandoval, Olivio, Jesús Forjans, Daisy Garcia

and others worked during this period in an effort to achieve the multiplicity of forms called for by Rostgaard. Under Rostgaard's direction, OSPAAAL's production in the 1960s has been called "the golden age of the poster", a designation appropriately reflecting the international acclaim it had garnered, particularly amongst the New Left in the West who saw it as an "embodiment of the aspirations and disappointments of the 1960s."²⁵

One of the visual languages adopted by Cuban artists was that of psychedelic art. A poster by Bill Graham *Jefferson Airplane* from February 1967 was transformed into Rene Mederos' Zimbabwean flag (3. 1): the distorted human figures of Graham's poster, which stood for the liberation of the sixties, anthropomorphised into the word 'Zimbabwe', in whose singularity, the entire force of action seemed directed. The freedom of marijuana and hallucinogen induced intoxication was diverted into the productivity of nationalist struggles. In a similar appropriation, the ubiquitous image of a seated female figure, whose transformed body reflected the new vocabulary of psychedelia was taken up in Raphael Zarza's poster commemorating October 12, 1969 as a Cuban *Day of Solidarity with the people of Laos*. (3.2) The earlier concert poster from 1967 depicted a female holding a ball with the stylised words "Joint Show". The play on sexual and narcotic liberation was conveyed through both the body of the woman and the ambiguous language. It was this metaphoric play of psychedelic language that was adopted and transformed in the posters produced by OSPAAAL following 1966. The rhetoric of liberation was transmuted into the service of revolutionary liberation. Zarza's poster transformed the female body into an iconic symbol of Laos, cradling and protecting the figure of a revolutionary guerrilla who stood poised for action. A poster produced by Rostgaard in 1971 depicted the maniacal vision of a soldier armed with an exploding weapon, controlled by a Nixonesque figure.(3.3) The referents and

codes of the psychedelic style, formed in London in early 1967, were invested, in the poster, with political acumen. "The organism of the supra-individual body, [the] attempted analogues for narcotic experiences, [the] techniques of excess," were adopted as metaphors for revolutionary change in the posters. The marked difference was the service to which this language was put. Whereas in London, psychedelic posters lauded the fight to legalise narcotics and promote the height of sexual and mental liberation, in Cuba, psychedelia emerged in its more political form. The manipulable language of drug induced euphoria was translated into the toxic platform for revolution. Set in swirls of organic forms and noxious shapes, Rostgaard's soldier was driven towards purpose. Smoke poured from his mouth, while fire ignited on his clothing. Within this confusion, the determination of revolutionary cause marked the forward stride of the figure. Psychedelic art, while never becoming fully ensconced in artistic discourse, found a consistent audience in attendees of concerts, rally and civil rights marches. Posters calling for the legalisation of marijuana or announcing upcoming rallies and concerts habitually returned to psychedelia's expressive forms, acknowledging its ability to rapidly disseminate information to its youth audience. The primary audiences for this new language were the youth participants in the rapidly growing drug culture. LSD, which had remained virtually unknown to the US population, remained legal until 1966, by which time use had exponentially spread across the entire country. Drug gurus such as Timothy Leary and Ken Kesey glamorised the liberal lifestyle associated with the new culture, promoting its spiritual and medicinal potentials. Drug use was seen as a way to splinter through the conformist structure of American society and emerge an individual. The appropriated language of psychedelia came to stand for the support of liberation through revolutionary struggle, replacing sex and drugs with the call to armed struggle. In Cuba, the "pure" visual onslaught of drug induced sensory escape that psychedelic art had come to represent was transformed

into an “expressive of moral *pleasure* in the ideas incarnated in the Revolution, together with a kind of physical joy in its achievements.”²⁶ The surrealist quality of the image revealed a fantasy deeply embedded in the history of cultural production on the island. Whereas the Europeans had imbued surrealism with protest and escapism, in Latin America, it had served to reveal the true character of the individual: “a means of making his dreams flow unmediated into his apprehension of social reality.”²⁷ In a similar fashion, the Western references of Pop Art, Op Art, Photorealism and Dadaist collage were taken up in various ways by OSPAAAL’s artists. Adapted to notions of solidarity and nationalism, as in the case of Psychedelic Art, these Western artistic styles were often reinvested with concerns particular to Cuba’s condition. Félix Beltrán, one of Cuba’s well known poster artists, recognised the importance that establishing an international art form played in revealing the concerns of the Cuban government to a global audience.

“The poster could circulate in countries where a functionary was not allowed to speak about the ideas of the revolution. These were posters with very complex messages or phrases from Che or Castro that were almost poetic. It was also a way for Cuba to denounce the contradictions of capitalism - especially those of the United States. One has to remember that in the '60s and '70s there were many problems in the U.S. such as racism, assassinations and abuses of political power. These were demonic examples of capitalism that were promoted inside Cuba as well as in other countries.”²⁸

Cuban poster artists produced images and slogans that were as comfortable beside posters of Paris in 1968 as they were beside the burgeoning protest movement against the US involvement in Vietnam. Using an internationally understandable visual language that concertedly rejected the dogmatism of Socialist Realism, OSPAAAL's poster artists attempted to, and were very successful at, producing images for the consumption of international audiences in Europe and North America. In Cuba, according to the language of OSPAAAL's posters, youth audiences would find a nation whose entire conception of its cultural values was placed on utopic revolutionism in the

form of solidarity. Solidarity would become an international symbol of Cuban nationalism, as recognisable to European and American youth as the explosive symbols of May 1968.

Discussions and Frameworks

From the middle of the 1970s, the Cuban poster has been the focus of numerous exhibitions and books in the United States, Asia and Europe.²⁹ Posters from the Editora Politica, the official publishing department of the Cuban Communist Party, the Cuban Film Institute (ICAIC), and OSPAAAL, have been exhibited in collective exhibitions reflecting 'Cuban Posters from the Revolution', often ignoring the specific function each organisation played in the creation of the overall propaganda program. The specificity and subtle differences in the languages, not only of each agency, but within each agency of the specific focus of each poster, is left out in favour of declaring its commanding graphic and revolutionary nature: its "hot colours associated with violent passions".³⁰

"Tricontinental and the OSPAAAL posters are eloquent testimony to Cuba's unremitting and vigorous ideological support for the Third World liberation, which most other socialist countries, in the interests of conciliation with the United States tended to mute."³¹

"The Cuban revolutionary poster owes nothing to its forebears, native or foreign. In an idiom entirely its own it emerges on the poster scene as an entity fully evolved – original, authoritative and completely independent."³²

In fact, the variety in the visual language adopted by the poster artists is often concluded to reflect the ability of the poster to circumvent and even survive "under the watchful eye of Castro's state."³³ Even the ubiquitous and democratic nature of the poster, both historically, and specifically within the Cuban context, has been confused with prevailing interests in its contemporary mystical character, its status as a decorative object of popular culture.

"At the present time, poster art is in a period of renaissance. Posters have come to be regarded as mysterious cultural objects, whose flatness and literalness only deepen their resonance, as well as inexhaustibly rich

emblems of the society. . . . Posters have become one of the most ubiquitous kinds of cultural objects—prized partly because they are cheap, unpretentious, "popular" art."³⁴

Lost in discussions of the Cuban poster is its complex function when placed within the specific social and political conditions of its genesis. While the ideological aspect of the Cuban poster is repeatedly raised, the particularity of the ideology is rarely explored.

"In retrospect, the outrage expressed in the posters against U.S. military intervention in places such as Vietnam and Latin America seems justified; one poster shows a menacing caricature of Richard Nixon, his cranium filled with a gory photograph of slain bodies. Informed by such visceral politics, the posters remain an invigorating evocation of the dreams, concerns, and symbols of an island nation caught up in the roiling waters of ideological conflict."³⁵

The function of the use of western aesthetics, while continually called upon, has been situated with the focus of promoting an international hybridised language. The primary focus has been the more colourful and arresting posters combining African symbology with weapons of resistance. Posters, such as Daysi Garcia's *Angola, Day of Solidarity, 4 February* (3.4) and Berta Abelenda's *Day of Solidarity with the People of South Africa* (3.5) have been frequently used as examples of the graphics and narratives used by OSPAAAL. Kunzle writes:

"Taken as a whole, the OSPAAAL posters constitute something of a museum of world cultural symbols, and a great diversity of ethnic representation. They systematically incorporate, as it were, a stamp of any given struggle's indigenous legitimacy, the style and/or an artefact typical of that country's native tradition, accompanied, often enough, by a symbol of modern armed resistance which defends or tries to recover that tradition."³⁶

Who is given the responsibility or authority in the 'recovery of that tradition'? Precisely what tradition is being recovered? In all, more than thirty five countries were depicted in OSPAAAL's posters, their divergent visual forms unified by their reiterative textual commitment to solidarity. Praise for the posters as a 'museum of world cultural symbols' confers OSPAAAL with the institutional status of simultaneous preservation and

presentation, providing 'any given struggle's indigenous *legitimacy*'. It is this question of legitimacy that this study endeavours to discuss. In the following chapter I will address a series of crucial questions. What role did the posters created by OSPAAAL play in legitimising Cuba's involvement in African movements of the late 1960s? Does concluding their status as legitimising agents deny their participation in a more complex climate of internal Cuban politics and external politics? More often than not, Cuba is given the historic credit of helping the success of revolutions throughout Africa, although occasional questions about Cuba's policy in Africa are related to issues of domestic negritude.³⁷ In light of the historical debates on Africa and 'blackness', do the symbols employed in the posters entirely constitute Cuba's desire to aid in the recovery and preservation of traditional African cultures? Are the grainy black and white photographs of heroic revolutionary fighters meant to implicate Cuba as historical recorder of these struggles? Or do these posters participate in a more complex desire to assuage increasing criticism, both domestically and externally, of the unchanging nature of discrimination and the pre-revolutionary nature of Cuba's racial structure?

Notes to Chapter Two

- 1 David Kunzle "Public Graphics in Cuba: A Very Cuban Form of Internationalist Art" *Latin American Perspectives*, vol. 2, iss. 4 (supplement issue: Cuba: La Revolution en Marcha (1975)): 95
- 2 Gerardo Mosquera *New Art from Cuba* (Old Westbury, 1985):1
- 3 This is a conclusion drawn by David Craven *Art and Revolution in Latin America 1900-1990* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002): 76
- 4 See Che Guevara "El Socialismo y el hombre en Cuba"; *The Cultural Policy of Cuba* (Paris, 1979); Camnitzer *New Art from Cuba*; and Mosquera "La function social de las artes plásticas dentro la Revolución" *El Caimán Barbudo* (Havana) vol. 19, no212 (July 1985) pp11-12
- 5 Mosquera "The Social Function of Art in Cuba since the Revolution of 1959" p12
- 6 Gerardo Mosquera "The Social Function of Art in Cuba since the Revolution of 1959" *El Caimán Barbudo* vol. 19, no. 212 (July 1985):11
- 7 But contrary to predominant conceptions of this process of cultural democracy, as David Craven points out, Cuban cultural production in the 1960s was not simply a directive of nationalist aspirations. In fact, the process of cultural democracy engendered a much more conflictual relationship between Cuban audiences and the Revolution. "In determining how art became more accessible to the Cuban population as part of a decentralisation of political power on the local level ... this process was also sometimes in structural conflict with the national centralisation of power by a Leninist vanguard. Indeed, the centrifugal forces of cultural democracy unleashed locally by the Cuban revolution were revealingly at odds with the centripetal forces of political vanguardism associated with the Communist Party that directed the revolutionary process on a national level." Craven p80
- 8 Camnitzer p109
- 9 *Ibid.*, p109
- 10 Luis Camnitzer *New Art of Cuba* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994): 109
- 11 David Kunzle *Che Guevara: Icon, Myth, and Message* (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1997): 31
- 12 Victoria Bonnell describes "meaning" as the challenging of old ways of comprehending the past, present and future. In the case of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, this included the attempt to "gain control over the sphere of public discourse and to transform popular attitudes and beliefs by introducing new symbols, rituals, and visual imagery." For Bonnell, it required the redefinition of "all social values by an immense message designed to liberate, but also to create a new mystique." Pierre Bourdieu *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984):3; Victoria Bonnell *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997):1
- 13 Craven p95
- 14 *Ibid.*, p96
- 15 *Ibid.*, p96
- 16 *Ibid.*, p94
- 17 Mosquera "New Cuban Art" p57 reprint in *Ibid.*, p96
- 18 Interview with Minister of Culture Armando Hart Davalòs by Luis Báez "Changing the Rules of the Game" reprint in Camnitzer p109
- 19 *Ibid.*, p95
- 20 David Kunzle "Public Graphics in Cuba: A Very Cuban Form of Internationalist Art" p90
- 21 Craven p95
- 22 Cuban posters were the result of three main producing agencies. ICAIC, created only 2 months after Fidel Castro's victory in 1959, used posters to promoting films created by, and imported for viewing on the island. These posters served, within a socialist context, one of the few examples of the remnants of capitalism. The posters produced by ICAIC in these first few years did not uncover a distinct revolutionary nature, but instead focused on a way of visually representing film in another medium. Film was one of the most popular and powerful artistic forces in Cuba, and

its ability to attract immense audiences of nearly 120 million a year, was an extraordinary feat for a country so small. The posters created under the direction of ICAIC did not aim to directly "sell" the film, but were instead meant to act as "visual embroideries" and "imaginative adjuncts" marking the streets and *paraguas*. The second group of posters, produced by the Commission of Revolutionary Orientation and Casa de las Americas, revealed mostly clearly the influence of Soviet socialist realist aesthetics. The posters produced under the direction of COR, were evidence of a concerted effort made, in the earliest years of the revolution, to align Cuban socialism with the Marxist-Leninist framework of Soviet socialism. But by the middle of the 1960s, Cuba had become increasingly concerned with accusations of its status as a Soviet satellite. While COR and Casa de las Americas continued to produce posters, their focus turned to representations of the revolutions heroes, including José Martí, Camilo Cienfuegos, Abel Santamaria, Frank País, Antonio Maceo and Che Guevara

23 Camnitzer p71

24 Alfredo Rostgaard in Shifra Goldman "Painters into Poster Makers: Two Views Concerning the History, Aesthetics and Ideology of the Cuban Poster Movement." *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 3 (1984): 169

25 Craven p95

26 Kunzle "Public Graphics in Cuba: A Very Cuban Form of Internationalist Art" p95

27 Ibid. p104

28 "Maggie Cuesta Interviews Félix Beltrán" ¡Propaganda! Cuban Political and Film Posters 1960-1990 published online at (<http://www.cuban-posters.freesevers.com/cubanpostershome.html>)

29 The first book on Cuban posters *The Art of Revolution: 96 Posters from Castro's Cuba, 1959-1970* by Donald Stermer and Susan Sontag was met with strong criticism from Cuban artists and government officials alike. They were angered by the manner "in which their posters [were] turned into consumer articles, with originals being sold by individuals, and exhibited and collected by prestige and fashion oriented museums." They felt that the aestheticisation of the poster diminished its political value. Sontag later revealed her regret in participating in this process of consumerisation. See Kunzle p92

30 Badio Rivadulla Jr. "The Film Poster in Cuba (1940-1959)" *Design Issues* 16.2(Sum. 2000): 36

31 David Kunzle *Che Guevara: Icon, Myth, and Message* p31

32 Maurice Rickards *Posters of Protest and Revolution*. (New York: Walker and Company, 1970):24

33 Maria Gainza "Cuban Poster". ¡Propaganda! The American Institute of Graphic Arts Exhibition, New York, June 29, 2001

34 Susan Sontag in "Posters: advertisement, art, political artifact, commodity" in Stermer

35 Jeremy Lehrer "Cuba Libre" *Print* 55.2(March/April 2001):14

36 Kunzle *Che Guevara: Icon, Myth, and Message* p30

37 Ibid. p 33

Chapter Three

“Neither Red, Nor Black”

“[*Mestizaje*] as rendered in Latin American writings, is more often than not tainted by racialised determinism ... endowed with a sort of cultural essentialism that has a priori subsumed race within its argument, despite the fact that race, in and of itself, is nothing more than the social construction of colour and culture ... a politicised paradigm used by the state for, among other things, national unification and homogenisation.”¹

“Afrocentrism” as Political Doctrine

The creation of OSPAAAL coincided with a particularly significant shift in Cuban foreign policy in the 1960s. In the middle of the 1960s, stifled by the sanctions of the American embargo, Castro sought to establish alliances with other countries that were experiencing similar economic hardships. Following the invasion at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961, and the Cuban Missile crisis in October of the following year, the Cuban government began to examine the issue of national security within the political climate of the Cold War. Angered by the trade embargo, as well as the repeated ultimatums offered by the White House (including numerous failed assassination attempts by the CIA), Castro began to question the priorities of the new Cuban government. For Castro, the American embargo was nothing short of the imperialist actions of a tyrannical capitalist bully. He felt that Cuba was being subjected to conditions similar to an American colony, and he believed it was the responsibility of the Revolution to counter this. In order to achieve this, Castro demanded a re-evaluation of the efficacy of its foreign policies. Castro believed that the only way to oppose the invasion of American capitalism was for Cuba to establish itself as an international power. While the global climate of the 1960s had remained bifurcated between the Americans and Soviets, Castro felt that Cuba would be able to create an entirely new form of global power, one that would include countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America whose processes of

decolonisation, Castro believed, mimicked the Revolution's attempts at resisting American hegemony. An alliance between Third World countries through the Nonaligned Movement would become Castro's most effective tool in creating this 'third' power. In late 1959, Walterio Carbonell, a young Afro-Cuban intellectual, who would later be appointed Cuban Ambassador to Tunisia, proposed a new foreign policy that he believed would allow Cuba to deal with rising domestic racial tensions. Carbonell proposed that Castro develop an *Afrocentric* foreign policy, which would adopt a pro-African stance and establish special links with black Africa.² Carbonell saw this new policy as a way for Castro to impress upon the local Afro-Cuban population that the Revolution was in fact committed to the support and salvage of the cultural and spiritual roots of the Afro-Cuban population. Africa was also seen as the key to establishing a network of Third World alliances that would position Cuba outside of the bifurcated climate of US-Soviet relations. For historian Carlos Moore, whose analysis of this policy is one of the most critical and comprehensive, "[i]f the Revolution was to resist absorption by the Soviet bloc, it was imperative that the momentum of the Cuban revolution converge with the radical mainstream of African nationalism and decolonisation."³ But Carbonell's *Afrocentric* policy was perceived as too radical for the conservative members of the Cuban government. In 1959 Carlos Fanqui, Director of *Revolución*, commented on this anxiety by saying: "There was in fact an attitude of contempt for Cuba's own Africanity by a leadership which was conspicuously composed of White Cubans."⁴ Concerned with the resistance to Carbonell's proposal, Castro was not ready to abandon his efforts at forging alliances with governments in Africa. The Soviet Union, the United States and China had all made repeated unsuccessful attempts at securing alliances with Ghana, Guinea, Algeria, Egypt, the Congo, and Ethiopia. Africa by the beginning of the 1960s had become a contested site for foreign interests. Colonel Gamal Abd Al-Nasser's nationalisation of the Suez Canal in 1956 and his victory

against the Anglo-French-Israeli coalition proved to be the first in a series of successful attempts undertaken by the new African countries. Anti-colonial nationalism put Kwame Nkrumah into power in Ghana in 1957, and Guinea declared its independence in defiance of France the following year under the leadership of Sékou Touré. Sensing the growing power of these new countries, Castro, in an endeavour to project the influences of the Cuban revolution, seized on the opportunity to use Africa to combat the global authority of the United States and its allies.⁵

By the late 1960s Carbonell's *Afrocentric* policy had taken a central role in Cuban international policy. "Stressing the overwhelming "Africanity" of Cuba's national psychology and home-grown cultures,"⁶ the policy saw racial kinship as the key foreign policy device in establishing links with Africa. Seeking an alliance composed of countries from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean, Carbonell reiterated Cuba's leading role in making this a reality. This third bloc was seen as a means of maintaining a level of independence and autonomy, as a way to defend national sovereignty, and exercise a greater influence in global events. In order to achieve this vanguard diplomatic position, Carbonell saw Cuba's population of African descent as its greatest asset.

"The *historic credit of linking Africa and Latin America* must belong to the revolutionary government of Cuba. Through such a union Cuba herself would be in a position to wield its diplomatic influence at the United Nations to the fullest extent...Cuba could then become a world diplomatic centre, staking out for itself a role of the highest order in the diplomatic history of this twentieth century ... the underdeveloped peoples would look up to Cuba and its government as their guide."⁷

Cuba, according to Carbonell, was better equipped to fulfill this leading role it since it was "less bound to tradition, and the conflict between the modern social structures [was] less sharp."⁸ These two factors combined – the historic linkage between Africa and Cuba, and Cuba's progressive and advanced nature – was seen as providing the

greatest justification for Cuba's ascendancy in the alliance. But Castro recognised the need to convince the Cuban population about the importance of this policy, both domestically and internationally. It would not be enough to proclaim solidarity with Africa through speeches and articles, Carbonell's plan needed the Cuban population to performatively enact solidarity through a commitment to ending racial discrimination. Mass rallies were convened in Havana by the labour unions, the Cuban Communist party and the Movimiento 26 de Julio to denounce racism and any other form of discrimination. Propaganda, in the form of pamphlets, billboards (*vallas*) and posters littered the Cuban urban and rural landscapes, promoting racial synthesis as the only means to achieving a coherent concept of nationhood. Castro's speeches began to make increasing reference to Cuba's 'Africanity', particularly in the international sphere. In a speech to the U.N. General Assembly on September 26, 1960, Castro provided three decisive links between the Cuban condition and its relation to the experiences of African nations in the 1960s.⁹ First, Cuba's subordinate position to the US meant that Cuba's experience of imperialism paralleled those of African countries.

"The difficulties which the people of Cuba have had with the imperialist Government of the United States are the same difficulties as Saudi Arabia, or Iran or Iraq, would encounter if they nationalized their oil. The same difficulties were encountered by Egypt when it, quite rightly, nationalized the Suez Canal."¹⁰

But the Cuban Revolution had thrown off the confines of this imperialist framework, and this process towards revolution in Cuba, according to Castro, was "an integral part of the general movement towards decolonisation in Africa."¹¹ Yet these two conditions were hinged on Castro's final provision, that Cuba had a duty to save Africa from the danger of destruction, and that Cuba's cultural and demographic links to the continent justified their place in doing so.

"[T]he Africa we see represented here by leaders like Kwame Nkrumah and Sékou Touré, the Africa of Nasser's Arab world [is] the true Africa, the

oppressed continent, the exploited continent with was the birthplace of millions of slaves, this Africa whose past is so full of anguish. To this Africa we have a duty: we must save it from the danger of destruction."¹²

The salvage of Africa, for Castro, was a task to which each Cuban was charged. It was the responsibility of Cuba to help in the understanding of the condition of Africa, and its struggle towards decolonisation.

"Let the other countries make some recompense! Let the West make up a little for what it has made Africa suffer, by preserving it from the danger of atomic war and declaring it a free zone as far as this peril is concerned ... Even if we can do nothing else, let this continent at least remain a sanctuary where human life may be preserved."¹³

In order for Cuba to secure its position as a global participant, the 'penetration' of Africa, militarily, economically, and ideologically needed to take shape.

"[T]hat Africa which we are beginning to know today, not the Africa pictured on the map or in novels and Hollywood films, not the Africa of semi-naked tribesmen armed with spears, ready to run away at the first clash with the white hero, that white hero who became more heroic the more African natives he killed."¹⁴

Cuba, according to Carbonell and Castro, needed to assume a key role in the dissemination of knowledge about Africa, and to this end, the establishment of OSPAAAL in 1967 was seen as fundamental.

Hybridity: Theories and Representations

While direct contact between Cuban and US artists had slowed under Castro's regime, it was the exposure of Cuban artists to some of Europe's most influential writers and intellectuals that helped foster the internationalist turn OSPAAAL's posters would take in the middle of the 1960s. The writings of Frantz Fanon, Jean Paul Sartre, Aimé Césaire, Frederic Jameson, Umberto Eco, Antonio Gramsci and Galvano Della Volpe were translated and made available in Cuba, both through primary sources, and reprints in the Soviet magazine *Cristerios*.¹⁵ The synthesis of popular Afro-Cuban culture with internationalist concerns in OSPAAAL's posters has been seen as the embodiment of

Fanon's correlation of the difference between "popular culture and populism with that of the distinction between national self-determination and nationalism."¹⁶

"As Fanon noted ... there are crucial differences between a progressive, internationalist popular culture that draws on indigenous art, and a regressive cultural populism that is based primarily on Western culture."¹⁷

But this discursive function is embedded with an ideology of privilege, placing one culture in the position of choosing those particular elements of the indigenous culture that must be salvaged. When this function is tied to conceptions of nationalism, according to Fanon, they breed the same colonialist structure against which they determine themselves.

"The efforts of the native to rehabilitate himself and to escape from the claws of colonialism are logically inscribed from the same point of view as that of colonialism. The native intellectual who has gone far beyond the domains of Western culture and who has got it into his head to proclaim the existence of another culture never does so in the name of Angola or of Dahomey. The culture which is affirmed is African culture. The Negro, never so much a Negro as since he had been dominated by the whites, when he decides to prove that he has a culture and to behave like a cultured person, comes to realise that history points out a well-defined path to him: he must demonstrate that a Negro culture exists."¹⁸

Fanon points to a crucial condition in the process of decolonisation. The 'native' must become embedded in the cultural 'future' of the decolonising nation, if not only to naturalise his participation in it, but also in an effort to propagate his participation. For Homi Bhabha, one of the conditions that mark out a colonialist discourse is its insistence on reproducing an image of a "reformed, recognisable Other ... that is almost the same but not quite."¹⁹ This idea of mimicry, where a flawed identity is imposed onto colonised people, who are obliged to mirror back an image of colonials but in an imperfect way: "almost the same, but not white", is seen as one of the most "elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge."²⁰ This concept is important, not only for its insistence on revealing these strategies, but also because it calls attention to the fact that issues of race and constructs of the "Other" function as intermediaries of power. In

Cuba, any reference to concepts of mulattohood or *mestizaje* following 1959 would have persisted this framework of power relations.

“...I believe that the idea of *mestizaje* or transculturation was and is guided by the dictates of power. If we agree that ‘culture’ acts as a form of institutional power, then the alleged exchange and mutual assimilation between coloniser and colonised, exploiter and exploited, rich and poor, European and non-European, East and West, or North and South can never be true transculturation, for such relations will always be mediated by privilege and assigned value.”²¹

The positioning of Africa within Cuban politics remained the domain of Cuban intellectuals who sought to maintain historical racialised discourses in their approach to the continent. Africa, according to Castro, would need Cuba to aid in the salvage and recovery, not only of their political independence, but of their cultural and spiritual roots; and the prominence of Cuba’s African ancestry only justified their position. The *mestizaje* nature of Cuban nationalism, according to Castro, meant that Cubans understood the “African condition”. Africa became homogenised into the collective representation of ‘blackness’ in OSPAAAL’s posters, subordinating the specificity of each country to the service to establishing a coherent visual programmatic. In preparing the conditions for this program, it would be the impetus of Cuban artists and intellectuals to choose the means and symbols appropriate. Reflecting the multitude of aesthetic forms adopted by OSPAAAL’s artists, symbols of Africa would reside in posters combining photographs of guerrilla fighters with indigenous cultural symbols such as masks, spears, and statues, set against the landscape of Western artistic languages.

OSPAAAL’s Rhetoric of Solidarity

Lucio Martínez’s poster *Day of Solidarity with Angola* (4. 1), printed in 1972 reveals one of the visual strategies adopted in the construction of this visual language of solidarity. In this poster, the stylised reconstruction of a human face, through lines

reminiscent of Op Art, act as a shield against the 'firing' of a cube. Pictured on the side of the cube is the emblem of NATO emitting gunfire into the suggestive shape of a rifle head. The predominant use of blue and red acts as a direct reference to the colours of the Cuban flag. Here, Martínez has transformed the Cuban flag into a shield, acting in the defence of Angola against the intentions of NATO to enforce demilitarisation. Naturalised as a force emanating from within Angola, the representation of Cuba's protective role suggests the inability of Angola to act in its own defence. In fact, the only means through which Angola is represented is by the colours of the Cuban flag, and the visual strategies of Western aesthetics, particularly the fluidly geometric forms of Op Art. Cuba's self-proclaimed duty to save Africa seemed to have found a visual strategy appropriate to its aspiration in Martínez's poster. What was the discursive function of posters such as Martínez's? Carbonell's *Afrocentric* policy, translated into the "Castro Doctrine" would form the foundation under which Cuban relations with Africa were taken up throughout the 1960s. The casting of Africa as a continent in need of salvaging, according to many scholars on the subject of Cuba-Africa relations, revealed more about domestic social and cultural fissures, than they did any real desire to aid in the decolonisation of Africa. Although Cuba's commitment to sending Cuban military, medical and educational personnel to Africa continued throughout the 1960s and following²², the conception of Africa's inability to act in its own defence remained prevalent. The presence of Cuban humanitarian initiatives in Africa was seen as an important step towards helping reinforce Africa's domestic economic and social concerns. But the presentation of Africa's political and international concerns would remain, according to Castro, the responsibility of Cuba to negotiate; Cuba's principal position in the third bloc would only reinforced its ability to act as a mediator between Africa and international organisations such as the U.N.²³ Positioning Cuba as both cultural and political mediator would become one of the central concerns of OSPAAAL's

posters. Solidarity would take the shape of representations of indigenous guerrillas, native statuary and masks, and other metaphors for the fight towards decolonisation taking place in Africa. Despite the multiplicity of forms, and the excess of symbols adopted by OSPAAAL, they almost exclusively maintained the idioms found in Martínez's poster. Cuba would emerge repeatedly as the defender and preserver of Africa: its people, its land, its political autonomy, its culture and its future. Cuba as the "Redeemer" of Africa would be the preoccupation of OSPAAAL's rhetorics.

While the production of OSPAAAL's posters reflected an adoption of multivalent forms, it is possible to classify them according to certain stylistic conventions. The use of Pop Art would become one of the most popular methods adopted. An example, Daysi García's *Day of Solidarity with Angola* (3.4) shows the adaptation of the autochthonous through the visual referents of Pop Art. The form of a local deity, a Cokwe thinker, is stamped on the forehead with a grenade, like a "third" eye of revolutionary wisdom²⁴, set in the vibrant colours reminiscent of Pop Art. In Cuba, a variation of Pop Art developed that reflected an interest in the art forms' ability to be measured in its "antiauthoritarian tendencies."²⁵ Where Pop Art had developed in the West as "a tool to handle the artificial cultural overlay created by the massive influx of pre-packaged consumer goods,"²⁶ in Cuba, its 'democratic' nature would be put to the service of more socialist concerns. Needing to captivate both local and international audiences, García's poster adopts the visual tenets of Pop Art

"This new language was characterised by several traits: a bold new use of colour that is even celebratory in effect; a non-Western use of space that undermined the static, ultimately ahistorical, spatial construction of Renaissance perspective ..."²⁷

But perhaps the most important function of Pop Art is provided by Andreas Huyssen, who writes "Pop seemed to have the potential to become genuinely 'popular' art and

resolve the crises of bourgeois art... Pop seemed to liberate high art from the isolation in which it had been kept in bourgeois society."²⁸ Having already been embraced by the New Left in the 1960s in Europe and North America, García's poster would have blending almost seamlessly into the international artistic scene. In García's poster, the traditional symbol is not so much foregrounded as it is displaced as the means through which the forms of Pop Art are conveyed. The 'stamp' of the grenade, instead of suggesting the national authenticity and historical continuity of resistance, becomes a static sign of revolution. The representation of a female deity only further problematises the casting of Africa as both racialised and sexualised. García's image was part of a significant thematic employed in OSPAAAL's posters patterning traditional masks and statues with symbols of modern warfare, specifically Soviet AK-47 guns. Placed onto the static forms of indigenous symbols, more often than not, they implied the failure of the local culture's resistive capabilities. Instead, Cuba was presented as the mediator between Africa's concerns and international audiences; Cuba as the protector and purveyor of Africa's plight. Like Garcia's poster, Africa would become the ideological battleground in international politics, where Cuba could present its leadership role, casting Africa as a 'problem to be solved'.

Besides the popularity of Pop Art styles, the use of Op Art's graphic qualities would also emerge in OSPAAAL's posters. Jesús Forjans' *Day of Solidarity with the Congo* (4. 2) produced in 1969 provides an example of this. The depiction of an African 'warrior' wearing a traditional grass skirt and holding a spear and machete in each hand is set against the bold, graphic red lines of a mask. In the eye of the mask, two bound hands are being freed by a disembodied hand. Forjans' use of Op Art is evident in the transmuting red and black lines forming the indigenous mask form. The stability and

immovability of the mask gives support to the figure of the warrior who is drawn in a crude sketch-like manner. Almost as if the mask is an apparition of the shaman-like warrior, the poster suggests a past called forward to give strength to the present. The casting of the Congo through the body of the warrior holding a machete and spear signals a return to the primordial; to the Modernist vision of the unspoiled, untouched primitive. Here the Congo is represented through tropes of mysticism and primitiveness, as a warrior whose incapability to defend himself is evident through his weaponry. But instead of rejecting the Congo's past, the poster suggests that it is in the celebration of their history that the Congolese have the greatest strength. In addition to the use of Pop Art and Op Art by OSPAAAL's artists, elements of photojournalism reinforced Cuba's role as the recorder and defender of Africa's fight for decolonisation. Tony Evora's *World Week of Solidarity with the Peoples of Africa* (4. 3) placed a photograph of an African man above the child-like script of the word "Africa", while wrapping lengths of barb-wire imprisoned the figure behind it. Evora's poster departs from the stylistic conventions of García and Forjans' model, but maintains many of the symbolic values associated with Africa. Once again Africa's inability to act in her own defence is enacted through the bound body of the figure, held in place by the razors of the fence. Even the script used in the word 'Africa' suggests childishness and backwardness. Evora's approach almost categorically defined OSPAAAL's conceptualisation of the inability of Africa to act in her own defence. Africa, according to OSPAAAL's posters, would require the support of external forces in realising its independence. ²⁹

Examples such as these are prolific in OSPAAAL's posters, illustrating over again the framework through which representations of Africa's move towards decolonisation would be established. Reiterating with almost singular conviction the

support of decolonisation in Africa, OSPAAAL's poster would act as visual testimonies of Cuba's *Afrocentric* policy. The adoption of a pro-African stance, and the desire to establish links to Africa was seen as a crucial means to convey to the Afro-Cuban population that the Revolution was committed to the defence and recovery of their cultural and spiritual roots. Racial kinship, for OSPAAAL's posters, would remain the significant means through which Cuba could establish relations with African nations: "the *historic credit of linking Africa and Latin America* must belong to the revolutionary government of Cuba."³⁰ The casting of Africa as a continent in need of salvaging, revealed more about Cuban social and cultural fissures, than they did any real desire to aid in the decolonisation of Africa. The attempt to consolidate the racial synthesis of the Afro-Cuban population would remain a spectre in OSPAAAL's posters in solidarity with Africa. After all, as I have discussed in chapter one, any manifestation of 'blackness' in Cuba was encoded with complicated social and political relations. In OSPAAAL's posters they would find a form that, while indicating a new stylistic phase in Cuban art, maintained significant relations to previous ideological conceptions of racial synthesis. Cuba as the salvager and protector of Africa echoed the subservient position placed onto Afro-Cubans. It is surprising, considering the international success of Cuban poster art that this has remained largely absent in the numerous discussions of its functions. Considering the prevalence of discourses of race on the island, critically located in discussions of 'blackness', the emergence of OSPAAAL's body of posters seems like an obvious continuation of images such as *Yo Tambien Soy Un Niño*. While the forms themselves are divergent, they clarify the relatively stable means through which discussions of race formed themselves in Cuba. In Cuba, according to advertisements and pamphlets, Afro-Cubans would require the help of all Cubans in order to achieve equal cultural and economic status. Through OSPAAAL's posters, Africa would require the help of Africa to realise its dream of decolonisation.

In Conclusion

This discussion has centred on the production of a particular body of posters between 1967 and 1972. While the production of OSPAAAL's posters did not end following 1972, these subsequent examples retained much of the rhetorical discourse established during the first five years of production. Through the 1970s and 1980s, OSPAAAL's posters would maintain their commitment to solidarity with decolonising efforts. But the climate of protest, the leftist audiences, and the belief in utopic revolutionarism, which had remained an aspect of the international climate in the late 1960s, had dissipated by the middle of the 1970s. The posters produced in the following decades became as stylised as the stagnant metaphors of Socialist Realism. Almost no new visual strategies were adopted by artists, and the posters quickly became the uncritical documents that so many scholars have charged them with being. Their celebration of solidarity and anti-imperialism did not evolve into products that could respond to the increasing global capitalism throughout the world. They remained tied to their genesis in 1967, retaining their connections to artistic movements which seemed no longer able to address contemporary concerns. It seemed that by the end of the 1970s, OSPAAAL's multivalent poster forms had indeed produced, according to international perception, a cohesive programmatic artistic style of 'solidarity', as dogmatically identifiable as the Soviet and Chinese models they had fought so hard against. But perhaps their greatest efficacy in the subsequent decades came from the adoption of their visual strategies by poster artists in countries throughout Africa. In Mozambique, Angola, Ethiopia and the Congo, numerous nationalist movements adopted the aesthetics of OSPAAAL's poster. In similar fashion, the use of Afro-Cuban symbols in Cuban art and culture did not end following 1972. Although their scholarship on their use in the 1970s is scarce, in the 1980s artists and writers once again began to use

references to Afro-Cuban symbols in their work. An exhibition which opened at the Centro de Arte Internacional in Havana on January 14, 1981 included José Bedia, Juan Francisco Elso Padilla, José Manuel Fors, Gustavo Pérez Monzón, Ricardo Rodríguez Brey and Rubén Torres Llorca. Known as the Volumen Uno generation, the artists were credited with creating a national identity that transcended officially imposed ideological limits of the Revolution. In the first two weeks of the exhibition, an unprecedented eight thousand visitors attended, and while the work in "Volumen Uno", in the opinion of many critics and scholars, did not provide a new radical conception of Cuban nationalism, the discussions and subsequent literature on the exhibition saw a revival of discussions on the place of Afro-Cuban symbols in Cuban art and literature. These debates, which are part of a long and complicated history in Cuban art, are becoming the subject of increasing scholarship. Interest in understanding the social and political dimensions of Cuban art are becoming more commonplace, each revealing that race has remained a crucial stratum of art, negotiating the fissures that marked a society striving toward desegregation. A fact that remains true in contemporary artistic production on the island today.

Notes to Chapter Three

- 1 Martinez-Echazabal p 33
- 2 Moore pp 71-73
- 3 Ibid., p71
- 4 Franqui in Moore 73
- 5 Dominguez xiv
- 6 Moore p73
- 7 Walterio Carbonnell "Congreso mundial de paises sub-desarrollados," *Revolución*, 5 December 1959, p2
- 8 Moore p75
- 9 "The Cuban leader's first major policy statement of the 'Castro Doctrine' on African can be summarised in three main points. Cuba and Africa are linked by historical bonds (the slave trade) and by common contemporary realities (underdevelopment and decolonisation). Cuba supports those forces on the black continent whose anti-imperialism qualifies them as the most representative voiced of the 'New Africa'. Finally, Cuba had a duty to perform towards Africa: to protect her from the manifold dangers of imperialism." Moore p91
- 10 Fidel Castro, *speech to the fifteenth session of the U.N. General Assembly, September 26, 1960*. In *Official Records of the General Assembly*, part 1, vol. 1 (New York: United Nations, 1960): 118
- 11 Moore p89
- 12 Castro, *speech to the fifteenth session of the U.N. General Assembly*, p133
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Luis Camnitzer *New Art of Cuba* p123
- 16 David Craven *Art and Revolution in Latin America* p 93
- 17 Ibid., p92
- 18 Frantz Fanon "On National Culture" *The Wretched of the Earth* p212
- 19 Homi Bhabha "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonialist Discourse" *October* 28 (Spring 1982): 126
- 20 Ibid., 126
- 21 Martinez-Echazabal p 38
- 22 For a detailed discussion of this, see Moore, Appendix 4 pp371-375
- 23 Many African leaders remained skeptical despite Castro's repeated attempts at securing this dominant position, particularly Nasser and Touré
- 24 this is a reading by David Kunzle *Che Guevara: Icon, Myth, and Message* p 30
- 25 Craven p102
- 26 Camnitzer p271
- 27 Craven p96
- 28 Andreas Huyssen "The Cultural Politics of Pop" *New German Critique*, 4 (Winter 1975): 81
- 29 Kunzle "Public Graphics in Cuba: A Very Cuban Form of Internationalist Art" p 95
- 30 Walterio Carbonnell "Congreso mundial de paises sub-desarrollados," *Revolución*, 5 December 1959, p2

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Figure 1.1
Jesús Forjans, *Day of Solidarity with Africa, May 22 to 28, 1969*



Week of Solidarity with Africa, May 22 to 28,
Jesús Forjans, 1969, 33x53cm

Figure 2.1
Artist Unknown, *So Near and Yet so Foreign*, c1920



Figure 2.2
Artist Unknown, *Yo Tambien Soy Un Niño*, 1959 in *Revolución*



Figure 2.3
Artist Unknown, *We want Castro!*, 1960



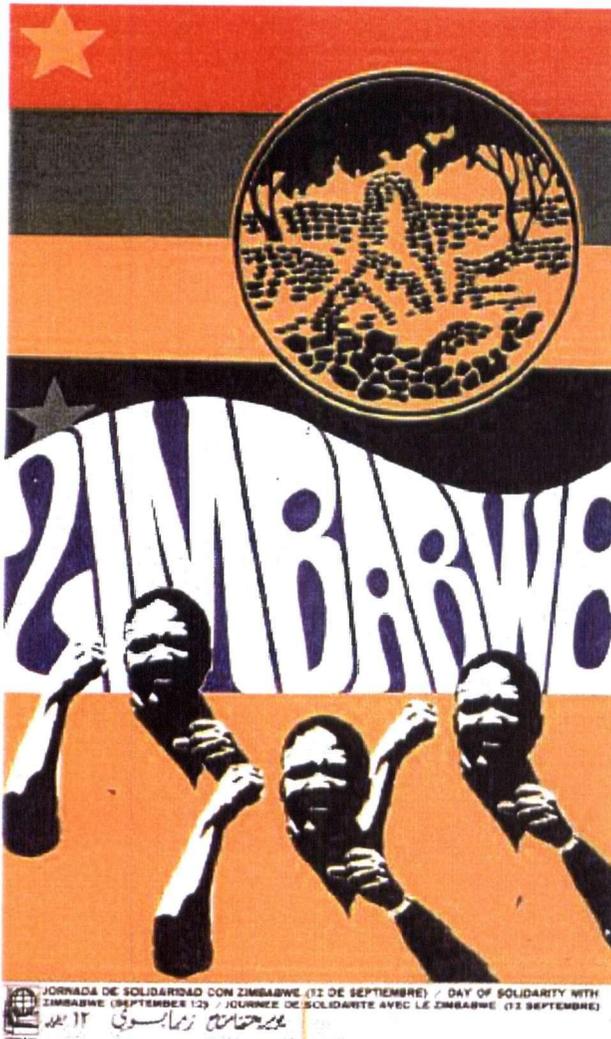
Figure 2.4
Thomas May, *This Style of Plaster Will Cure All Their Wounds*, 1899 in *Detroit Journal*



Figure 2.5
Westerman [?] Yo' watch me, chile, mebbe yo'hab a chance yo'se'f some day, in the Ohio
State Journal, 1906



Figure 3.1
Rene Mederos, *Day of Solidarity with Zimbabwe*, 1967



Day of Solidarity with Zimbabwe
Rene Mederos, 1968, 33x53cm

Figure 2.6
La Horandez, Agua Florida Para Blanquear la Piel, c1890

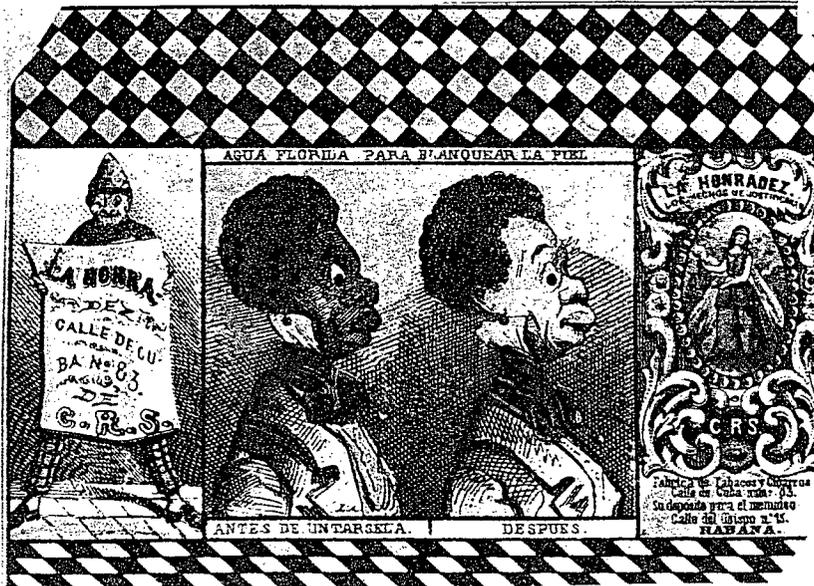


Figure 3.2
Raphael Zarza, *Day of Solidarity with the people of Laos*, 1969



Day of solidarity with the people of Laos
Rafael Zarza, 1969, 33x53cm

Figure 3.3
Alfredo Rostgaard, *Untitled: Nixon*, 1971



Alfredo Rostgaard, 1971, 33x55cm

Figure 3.4
Daysi Garcia, *Day of Solidarity with Angola*, 1969

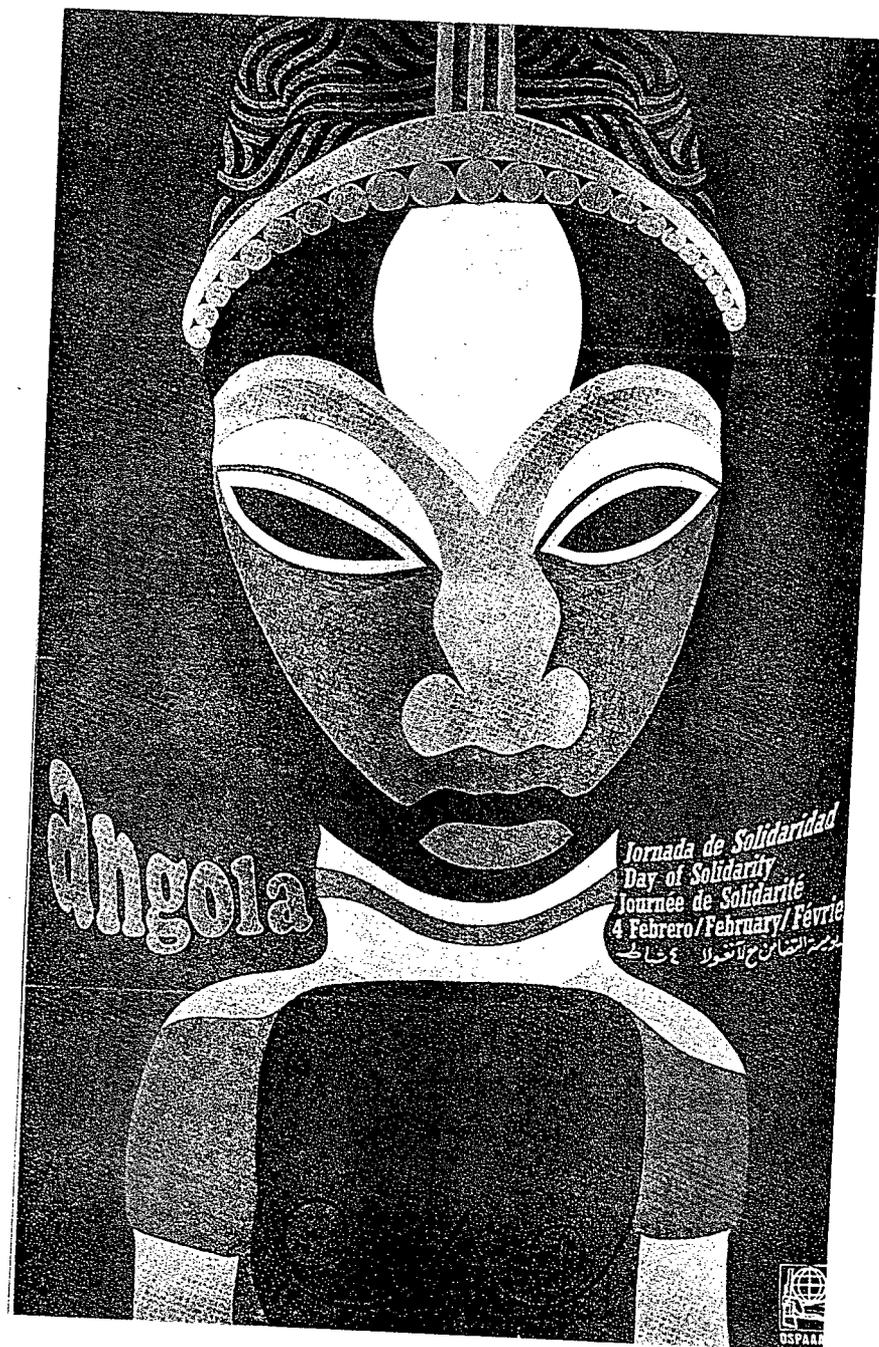
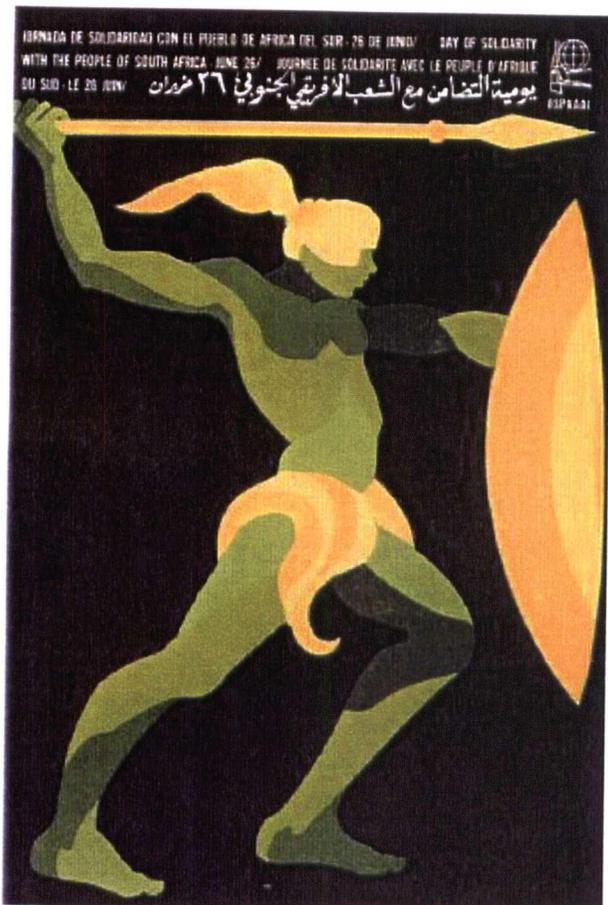
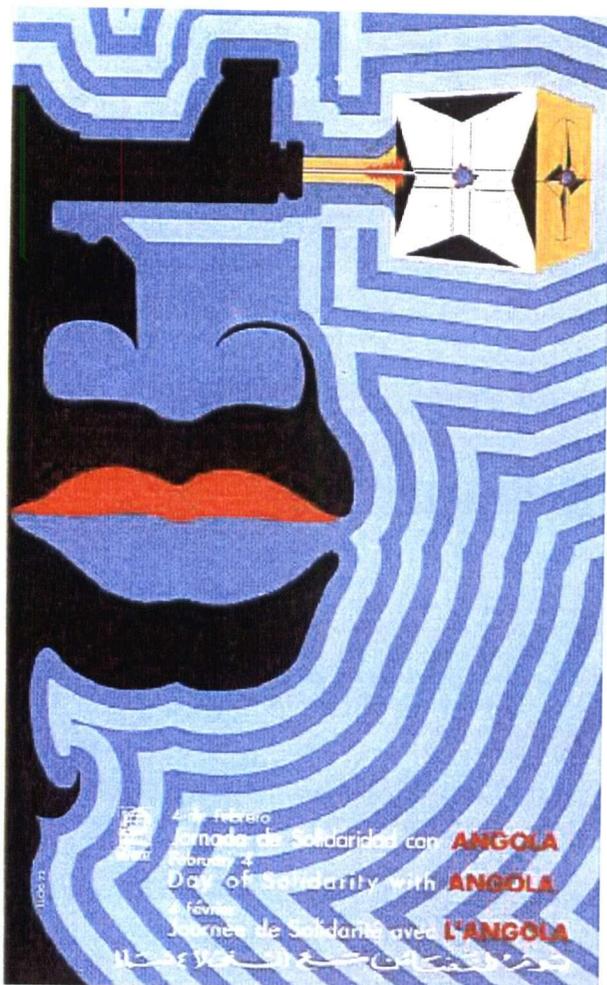


Figure 3.5
Berta Abelenda, *Day of Solidarity with the People of South Africa*, 1969



Day of Solidarity with the people of South Africa
Berta Abelenda, 1969, 33x53cm

Figure 4.1
Lucio Martínez, *Day of Solidarity with Angola*, 1972



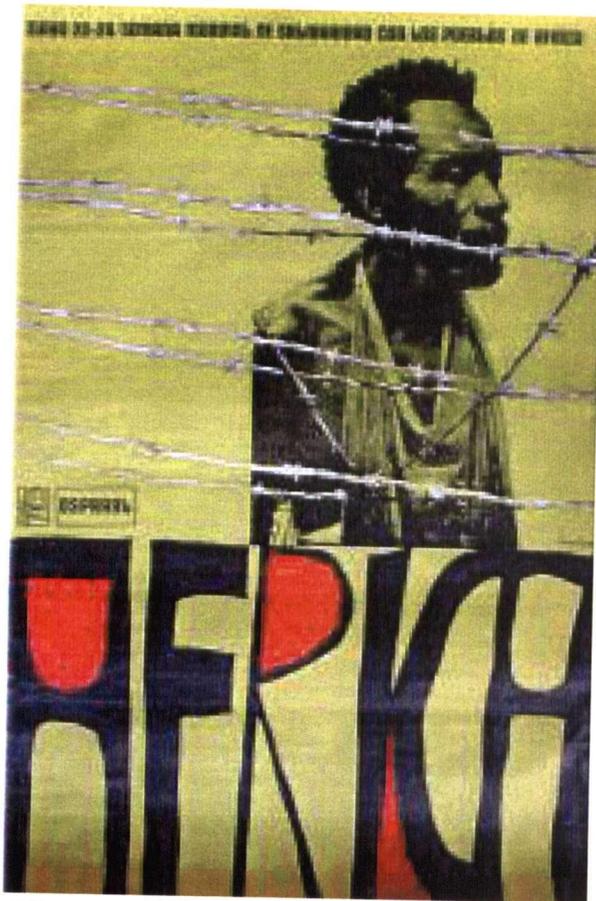
Lucio Martínez, 1972, 33x53cm

Figure 4.2
Jesús Forjans, *Day of Solidarity with the Congo*, 1969



Day of Solidarity with the People of Congo
Jesus Forjans, 1969, 33x53cm

Figure 4.3
Tony Evora, *World Week of Solidarity with the Peoples of Africa*, 1969



Tony Evora, 1967, 51x78cm