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JAROCHO PUBLICS AND THE PRESENCING OF BLACKNESS IN THE PORT CITY OF
VERACRUZ, MEXICO

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For my grandma.

“There are moments, without knowing why, one has the impression that Veracruz was the entrance to a country where mestizaje has been done not by the Indians, but by black people.”

–Juan Rejano, *La mestiza esfinge* 1939

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INTRODUCTION: VERACRUZ AND THE PLACE OF BLACKNESS

I was running late to an event at the Veracruz Institute of Culture (IVEC), and I knew quite clearly what my options were. There was no time to stroll along the *malecón* and take in the saltwater air as people often do once the sun hangs low in the sky and the heat creeps towards being bearable. The interior route through the old neighborhood La Huaca, while more direct, would not have been much faster due to the cautious pace demanded by the disrepair of the sidewalks. Nor was there time to wait along the Bulevar for the Boca del Rio bus to bound around the bend and pick me up at the unmarked bus stop whose location only experience revealed to me. Having lived near the main artery that is Xicotencatl since I first visited Veracruz¹ in 2011, I knew my best option would be to take a taxi down the one-way street before turning left on Calle Morales, a street that would carry me away from the sea and into the historic downtown area. Despite Veracruz–Boca del Rio being the largest metropolitan area in the state of Veracruz with more than six hundred thousand residents, my activities were largely limited to the downtown area and the immediate neighborhoods surrounding it. Even had it not, Veracruz retains a small-town feel due to lives lived in public and the friendly, open nature of many locals.

Friendly or not, I knew better than to rush into the first taxi I flagged down without going through the ritual of getting a price quote— “¿cuánto me cobras?” Satisfied that my foreign appearance was not prompting a price hike, I sat in the back to relax into the short trip down the street. I quickly realized, however, that while IVEC was one of my touchstones in the city, this

¹ For clarity, when I say Veracruz, I will be referring to the city unless explicitly stated otherwise.

was not the case for my taxi driver. He was not a member of the *jarocho* public with whom I spent much of my time. Of course, it could have been because he was enjoying our conversation.

“Mi hija tiene cabello como el tuyo—chinito chinito,” he revealed to me. An opening; a connection. I had just twisted out my hair, making my curl pattern looser, with the strands stretching further from my scalp. It was to this texture that he compared his daughter’s hair. He was very excited by this coincidence, and I was too, but perhaps for a different reason. When I entered the taxi, I had been worried about being late to go “do research” on blackness in Veracruz and in the process the research had found me. I had not asked a question, yet I had occasioned this interaction (Fabian 1990). This was not the first time. My experience in Veracruz is littered with these unexpected connections.

Weeks later while in La Huaca for a festival, a fellow attendee stopped me as I was passing. He worked to keep the emotions out of his voice as he told me that my *rasgos*, or features, reminded him of his mother. When I tried to get him to specify, he reiterated that I looked like her with a vague wave of his hand toward my face and hair. Every so often during the event, he would catch my eye and acknowledge me, doing so again as I was leaving. It felt impolite not to return the gestures, but I remained unconvinced. What did it mean for him when he said I reminded him of his mother? How literal was the taxi driver being when he said his daughter had hair like mine?

By the time I had these encounters, I had shifted my ethnographic gaze away from Black people to blackness. Yet I was always eager to note the moments when my presence occasioned these connections, especially when those connections were to a generation in either direction. While I had moved to the abstract, my presence and the reactions it prompted would return me to

the specific. It was like those magic eye pictures—counterintuitively, the image sharpened the more I pulled away and let my gaze relax.

The Jarocho

As a government entity, IVEC is the brightest star in a constellation of official narratives about Veracruz and its local culture. Throughout its robust schedule of events, the governmental organization fulfills its mission to “preserve, promote, and disseminate culture, through the broad and plural participation of the citizenry in order to fortify the values and cultural heritage of Veracruzanos.”² However, my first encounter with narratives of blackness in Veracruz came from a panel in the City Museum. The City Museum, which is free to the public, is located a block away from IVEC and is housed in a former orphanage and hospital. Currently, the museum charts the history of the city from the precolonial period until the 20th century. A panel dedicated to explaining the term jarocho stands at the threshold between the colonial and modern period galleries and is worth quoting at length:

Where was “the jarocho” born?

In the 18th century casta society, particularly in the central coastal region of the Gulf, “jarocho” was a pejorative term for people of Indian and Black mixture. It meant (in Andalusian-Arabic) “wild pig” or “*jara*³ carrier” or “*garrocha* (spear)”. In the plains and coasts of this region, those sticks were used by the black cowboys of the *haciendas* to drive the livestock to market in Veracruz, Puebla, and Mexico. The term alluded to, then, the activity most characteristic of the *afromestizos* of said region: free or enslaved, as cowboys in the great livestock ranches.

This *afromestizo*—similar to the “*guajiro*” of Cuba or the “*jíbaro*” of Puerto Rico⁴—would include at the end of the 18th century squadrons of *pardos* and *mulatos*⁵ armed with lances that defended the port, and during the war of Independence, formed part of the insurgent troops in the region.

² <http://ivec.gob.mx/mision.php>

³ Instrument used to herd cattle.

⁴ Both terms refer to rural folk and are often credited as the backbone of the nation’s culture.

⁵ Both *pardo* and *mulato* are casta terms for people of African descent.

Until the end of the 18th century and in the 19th century, it remained a derogatory term, and was used for the mestizos of the Veracruz countryside of European, African, and indigenous roots, with a predominantly black aspect. The “jarocho” began to be recognized for his lively and fun-loving character. From the 1930s, “jarocho” applied to—especially among outsiders—not only to the inhabitants of the Papaloapan River Basin and the southern plains, but also to the inhabitants of the city of Veracruz, hence the name “puerto jarocho”.

The city’s official narrative, then, acknowledges that “jarocho” was a pejorative term for afro-mestizo cowboys and later militiamen with their African ancestry being the most important aspect. The term shifted from having an occupational definition to a character one—*alegre and bullanguero*—before becoming a regional term for inhabitants of southern Veracruz from the port city to the southern plains in the early 20th century. It leaves unanalyzed the mechanism through which the jarocho was deracialized and instead regionalized. While first appropriated by individuals of mixed-ancestry, it was then again appropriated by the state to become a regional type broad enough to encompass all inhabitants.

However, the state’s influence does not end in the early 20th century. The panel’s narrative ends decades too early. Or rather, the panel itself serves as tangible evidence of the late 20th century’s treatment of the jarocho at the hands of the state and under the influence of multiculturalism. The blackness that was once predominant in the jarocho becomes the source of the type’s uniqueness. The jarocho does not become black again, but blackness and the jarocho are once again cleaved together. This has created a complicated identification process in which the regional identity becomes again ethnicized. For example, the entry for jarocho in the *Diccionario Enciclopédico Veracruzano*, published by the Universidad Veracruzana in 1993, reads:

Early term used by the Spanish, to disdainfully distinguish the *mulatos pardos*, a mix of Indian and Black, primarily in the central coastal area of the state. By the eighteenth

century this meaning had already disappeared. It is possibly derived from *jaro*, wild pigs of southern Spain, plus the derogatory, *cho*. During the Wars for Independence and Reform, it began to be accepted as a symbol for those from jarocho land. By extension, all inhabitants of the central coastal area of the state, and for those outside of the state, for all veracruzanos. It is not, contrary to popular belief, assumed by everyone. In other zones, they proudly defend being, depending on the case, Huasteco, Xalapeño, etc.

[Ant. término usual para dirigirse con desprecio, por parte de los españoles, a los mulatos pardos, mezcla de indio y de negro, princip. en la z. costera del centro del edo. y en las LLANURAS DEL SOTAVENTO. Hacia el s. XVIII esa acepción ya había desaparecido. Deriva pos. de jaro, puerco montés en el S de España, más el despectivo cho. Durante las Guerras de Independencia y de Reforma, se empezó a aceptar como símbolo del ser de la tierra jarocho./Por extensión: todo hab. de la costa centro del edo. y, para quien no es del edo., todos los veracruzanos. No es, contra lo que piensa, asumido por todos ellos. EN otras z. se defiende orgullosamente ser, según el caso, HUASTECO, XALAPEÑO, etc.]

While the encyclopedic dictionary dates the broadening of the term's meaning to the nineteenth century rather than the earlier twentieth, the narrative arc from ethnic slur to regional symbol repeats itself. It always remains after the fact. While my ethnographic research in 21st century Veracruz does not directly address this just-so story, it does focus on the after-the-fact nature of *lo negro* in *lo jarocho*. While museum panels and encyclopedic entries may gloss over such connotative shifts, they are often lived experiences. This moment in history is doubly important because many of my interlocutors remember when jarocho was purely a derogatory term and are now living through efforts where the jarocho is being recruited as an example of a national-level Afro-Mexican category. This ethnographic study is a generation removed from the multiculturalist moment that valorized blackness as a cultural contribution and at the cusp of a different multiculturalist moment that focuses not on blackness but on Black people. The jarocho and their proprietary treatment of blackness as something that has always been theirs remind us that these national-level policies exceed governmental agendas and outlast trends.

Jarocho Publics and Presenting Blackness

Eight years ago, I planned to research how official recognition of the African presence and contribution in Mexican society affected the lives of Afro-Mexicans. I was to explore how the multiculturalist policy called *Nuestra Tercera Raíz*, or Our Third Root, affected the everyday lives and identity politics of those who embodied said third root, given the trope that the African contribution and presence were too often “hidden” or “forgotten.” The Our Third Root program was part of a multiculturalist wave in Latin America that assumed the celebration of African cultural roots would combat the stigma associated with blackness and lead to the adoption of Afro-descendant identity (Rinaudo 2012). The situation in Veracruz disproves this theory. Thirty years on, the Our Third Root program has made *lo negro*, which I gloss as blackness, a very real presence in the port city. The ease with which people refer to and claim their Afro-Caribbean heritage suggests the de-stigmatization of blackness, but this is not limited to *los negros*, the Afro-Mexicans—a label which was only officially recognized after I had concluded my long-term fieldwork. Contrary to multiculturalist theories, those most conversant on blackness do not identify *as* Black but rather identify *with* blackness itself. Jarochos may not be the only group of people who live this reality and attending to such populations would broaden the ambit of how to research the African Diaspora in Latin America and beyond.

In fact, the loudest to claim and proclaim Veracruz’s blackness are members of what I call *jarocho publics*, those affinity groups who practice and support the cultural activities considered to be iconic of the port city. Jarocho publics refers to both the public spaces in which the jarocho-ness of Veracruz are on display for tourists’ eyes, and more importantly to the audiences and individuals who engage in spaces organized around self-reflective discourse about their jarocho-ness. Through their actions, these participants constantly instantiate and presence

the Afro-Caribbean heritage of the Gulf Coast city. Jarocho publics engage in the *rescate* of blackness in all its multivalence. The Spanish verb *rescatar* alternately means to rescue or save, to recover, to retrieve, and to revive. Jarocho publics have rescued blackness from the obsolescence too commonly associated with *mestizaje*; recovered and retrieved their local blackness through archival resources; and revived the longstanding association of jarochos with Mexico's black popular culture. Consequently, the Afro-Caribbean heritage serves as a cultural resource (Hall 1995) to better practice the jarocho character,⁶ to make them distinct within the Mexican nation, and to make them a part of the larger Afro-Andalusian Caribbean.⁷ As a result, blackness is integral to the identity marker locals are more accustomed to—the jarocho. In this way, the third root is deeply implanted in Veracruz, and through the labor of such enthusiasts, continues to bear fruit.

This ethnography is a study of the emergent nature of the Afro-Caribbean origin stories among the jarocho publics whose practice reaffirms and renews the jarocho persona in Veracruz. As the anthropologist Stephan Palmie argues, “[A]s discursive objects, “origins” are fundamentally emergent in nature and can be studied ethnographically as they arise” (2013, 46). Jarocho publics actively reference practices from when the term was ethnoracial. Therefore, while blackness is not the only constituent part of the origin stories jarochos tell themselves about themselves, it nevertheless functions as the difference that makes a difference.

⁶ For outsiders, everyone from the state of Veracruz are called jarochos, though within the state who qualifies as jarocho is a point of contention.

⁷ Mexican scholar Antonio García de León coined the term Afro-Andalusian Caribbean in 1992 as an expansion on the French historians' Pierre and Huguette Chanu's 1950s term the Andalusian Caribbean. The concept of the Andalusian Caribbean signals Andalusia's centrality in the Spanish colonization of the Americas. García de León argues that the prefix “Afro-” is necessary not only for the transplantation of Africans but also for the translation of ideas like the *encomienda* system, African slavery, and colonization, that were first developed on the Spanish colonies in Africa.

The most important jarocho publics include: the *jaranero* community who practice the fandango culture⁸ associated with the folkloric musical genre, son jarocho; the *danzonero* community which comprises of dancers dedicated to the Afro-Cuban ballroom dance the danzón; regular attendees to the calendar of events hosted by the Veracruz Institute of Culture (IVEC) that focus on Afro-Caribbean themes; and the community of dancers who frequent the public space called the Plazuela where Afro-Antillean music is regularly played and enjoyed. While some individuals are members of more than one of these publics, the way each community embraces and valorizes the Afro-Caribbean influence of their practice is the tie that binds them.

Jarocho publics constitute themselves as groups (Brubaker 2002) through the *rescate* of blackness which they use to be more fully jarocho. Practitioners look back into their own local past, taking quite literally the possessive pronoun of the Our Third Root program and making it radically local rather than national. This holds even when considering the Afro-Antillean dances and musics that organize these groups. Although a genre or particular piece of music is from another part of the Afro-Andalusian Caribbean, its localization receives the highest homage. Despite E. Patrick Johnson's assertion that "'blackness' does not belong to any one individual or group" but is instead always appropriated by a group to "circumscribe its boundaries or to exclude other individuals or groups" (2003, 2-3), jarocho publics both appropriate from their Afro-Caribbean heritage while also maintaining a stance that it is proprietary to them.

Whereas Afro-Latin Americans are often ambiguously both inside and outside of the national imaginary (Ng'weno 2007), the jarochos are unambiguously Mexican due to their importance in the nation's founding and history. Therefore, they insert blackness into

⁸ A fandango is a social event in which participants collectively interpret pieces of music in the son jarocho repertoire called *sones*. These jaraneros are distinct from other musicians who play or dance son jarocho as performance, be it as itinerant musicians or ballet folklórico dancers.

Mexicanness. This is despite the hegemonic mestizaje ideology of the early 20th century nation-building project that made the Mexican equivalent to the mestizo—a term that highlighted the European and Indigenous contributions while eliding the African ones (Moreno Figueroa and Saldívar Tanaka 2015). Because of the third root movement, jarocho have embraced their black heritage to such an extent that many academics and amateur scholars argue for the removal of the ordinal numbering “third,” which diminishes the role of blackness in jarocho culture.

Regardless, Mexico is by no means exempt from Ronald Stutzman’s famous definition of mestizaje as “an all-inclusive ideology of exclusion” (Stutzman 1981). For much of Mexico, Afro-descendants have not been “an ingredient” in the “ideological biologies of national identity” (Rahier 2012, 1). Ethnomusicologist Hettie Malcomson has observed that blackness is largely understood as an additive to “a monolithic, bipartite Mexican mestizaje” (2016, 48) in Veracruz. While she characterizes blackness in this context as “one minor thing” and the addition of race (blackness) into nation (Mexico), I read the situation differently. On the national level, Malcomson’s critique perhaps bears out, but I argue that the emphasis on localized blackness in Veracruz makes it the “otra cosita,” to borrow a phrase from son jarocho, the little extra thing that sets Veracruz as unique. It is a regional intervention more than a national one. While of a similar scale, “one minor thing” can be dismissed whereas “the little extra” thing stands out. The late 20th century turn from “monocultural mestizaje” to multiculturalism increased the discourse around blackness in Veracruz, but it was not a new discovery. Throughout its history, Veracruz has had a reputation of blackness (Pérez Monfort 2007). In fact, it is the always already quality to blackness and its subsumption into the jarocho type that makes Veracruz unique. It requires one to consider blackness within the logic of mestizaje rather than as an ignored ingredient or marginalized population.

The increased discourse on the jarocho's Afro-Caribbean heritage supports a regional identity rather than a political one and requires an analysis that shifts away from authenticity toward sincerity (Jackson 2005). Authenticity as it relates to identity often presupposes that people both have the right to be acknowledged publicly as what they already are and that what they already are aligns with recognizable collective identities (Appiah 1994). Perhaps this explains why many ethnographers interpret the lack of political identification as Afro-descendant in Veracruz as a denial of blackness itself (cf. Sue 2010; Hall 2008; Jones 2013). However, as the French sociologist Christian Rinaudo has argued, locals are not trying to be Black. Instead, he argues that some are trying to act like a black person (Rinaudo 2010). In this latter point I disagree. The 'black' characteristics he points out are in the service of the jarocho type and for which they consider themselves to be proprietors. Rather than trying to act Black, they are practicing their jarocho identity. As Kwame Appiah argues, "We make up selves from a tool kit of options made available by our culture and society. We do make choices, but we do not determine the options among which we choose" (1994, 155). For jarochos, blackness is part of their toolkit. And because it is not imagined as part of the broader Mexican toolkit, it serves as an ideal differentiator vis-à-vis the rest of the nation. In other words, jarocho publics constantly choose to engage with their blackness in order to make their regional identity distinct.

These jarocho publics presence their blackness through the repetitive nature of practice, be it narrative recitation or corporeal repetition. Through practice, blackness is familiarized, strengthening the always already quality it holds in the port city. While many of these publics have a performance facet through shows, competitions, and presentations, performance theory does not fully capture how blackness is presented in Veracruz. While performative, the idea of performance itself suggests a fleetingness, as it "becomes itself through disappearance" (Phelan

1993). In contrast, blackness in Veracruz becomes itself through its various repetitions and recitations. The narratives of the jarocho's character; genealogies of cultural practices; and liberating structure of collective music and dance all recover, recuperate, and revitalize an afromestizo⁹ past, and in doing so, presence it and project it into the future. By grounding blackness in practice, it also makes it available to everyone engaged in these jarocho publics. You cannot become Black, but you can become jarocho.

The Puerto Jarocho

“They say that if you stay here a year, you’ll never leave,” Pancho¹⁰ revealed to me, starting a conversation seemingly at its middle. “Oh really?” I replied, hoping he’d elaborate on his claim. Instead, he merely shrugged and smiled before turning to another member of the son jarocho workshop where we two transplants had found a community, not just a hobby. Neither he nor I had yet been in Veracruz a year. Nevertheless, I could see the truth of his statement, having heard the sentiment from natives, transplants, and ex-pats alike since my first field visit in 2011, with the bulk of the offhand commentary occurring during my year of sustained fieldwork beginning in August of 2014. I had stayed the year, but ultimately left. Pancho, incidentally, is still there. Common sayings are often common for a reason.

In a way, with my repeated visits, I have not left the city either. Not really. Of course, I am not the first ethnographer to be enchanted by her field site and somewhat entrenched in it. I have yet to remove myself from a group chat despite my exasperation at its devolution into chain messages and memes. I schedule visits back to include a fandango more to play and visit with

⁹ I use the term afromestizo to emphasize the genealogical and cultural mixture of people of African, indigenous, and European descent.

¹⁰ All names are pseudonyms unless discussing public figures in their capacity as such.

people rather than to conduct follow up research. Whenever I return, I invariably run into someone I know in the historic center. I have become attached.

Perhaps that is why Madame Calderón de la Barca's observations of Veracruz in her book *Life in Mexico* resonated with me so strongly when I came across them while writing this dissertation. Published in 1843, she recorded her rather unimpressed observation of a depressed, recently invaded Veracruz, writing: "[T]hough even now, those who have resided [in Veracruz] for any length of time, even foreigners, almost invariably become attached to it; and as for those born here, they are the truest patriots, holding up Vera Cruz as superior to all other parts of the world" (24). Writing in December of 1839, she was experiencing Veracruz a year after the French invaded during the Pastry War. Part of her commentary, therefore, considered the aftermath of a recently occupied town. Nevertheless, her letter, like many of those penned in the 18th and 19th century, had all the requisite mentions of Veracruz—the sand, the disagreeable weather, the *vomito*, or yellow fever, and the *zopilotes*, or big black buzzards that never went without mention in the letters and travelogues historians now use to reconstruct an image of the Veracruz of yore. In one particularly unyielding commentary, the ambassador's wife remarks, "To me nothing can exceed the sadness of the aspect of this city and of its environ [...] The scene may resemble the ruins of Jerusalem, though without its sublimity." Ruins without even the benefit of the sublime. It is in this context that she nevertheless conceded the fact that those who pass time in the Port "become attached to it." Over a century and half later, Veracruz retains this quality, as evident in Pancho's comments and others like it. Veracruz has a way of enmeshing you.

For a port city to enmesh runs counter the dynamism associated with such transitory spaces, though it is its function as a port that has fomented the attachment porteños have to

blackness. In his article, “Mediterranean Port Cities: Cosmopolitanism Reconsidered” (2005), Henk Driessen muses that port towns have been under-examined in anthropology because the “passage, transience, openness and flux” of such cities run counters to the “discipline’s emphasis on regularity, continuity and tradition, on the orderly and circumscribed, and on small-scaleness” (131). He goes on to argue that port towns work as both “hinges” between groups and magnets that attract people, power, and capital among other things. The porosity of such places—which Driessen deems both intrinsic and essential to their survival—is tantamount to the dynamism and movement of such towns. At first blush, this troubles Keith Basso’s charge for the discipline to dwell in order to capture what he calls a “sense of place” or a sensing of a place (1996, 54). However, while it is true that all who enter do not dwell, those who pass through often develop their own sense of a place. Madame Calderón de la Barca’s first impression was less than favorable of the downtrodden port city, yet she captured a sense of the place called Veracruz not just with her observations on sand, buzzards, and ruination, but also with the way in which those who *have* dwelled “for any length of time” grow attached. You can dwell in the flux of a port city. Think of that feeling you get when you stand planted in the overly saturated, silken sand at water’s edge as the tide goes in and out around you. Recall that unsteady steadfastness of the sea alternately robbing and giving you the very sand you have claimed as your own. As you sink—either by loss or by gain—you become attached.

The long, skinny state of Veracruz hugs the Gulf of Mexico’s curve, and the city from whence it gets its name is its most important port and its most populous municipality. The city has a tropical climate with a dry season characterized by strong winds called nortes from roughly mid-autumn until mid-spring, and a wet season the other half of the year. While subject to torrential rain and debilitating heat during the wet season, Veracruz often avoids direct hurricane

hits due to its tucked in location. Inclement weather from either the dry season's nortes or the wet season's tropical storms can affect daily life and the commercial port's activities. The skeletal frames of billboards with the vinyl announcement rolled up act as unofficial weather announcements as does the line of ships in anchorage on the horizon.

The Puerto Jarocho, as the city is known, has played a key role in the history of the region from the very beginning, and the city wears this long history sometimes haggardly, sometimes well. It ranks among the group of cities anthropologist Shannon Dawdy (2016) calls "antique" in both its aesthetic and its declarative imagined community. Like its peer New Orleans, Veracruz "is a package of self-reinforcing representations and practices," (4). In these representations and practices Veracruz refuses to choose between its Caribbean bona fides and its Mexican-ness. The stories jarochos tell themselves and visitors about themselves makes the city the cosmopolitan center of gravity between these two regions rather than a peripheral locale. As such, the common narrative trope of isolation associated with many studies of Afro-descendants in Latin America does not apply.

Founded by the conquistador Hernán Cortés on April 22, 1519, Veracruz was the first European city in mainland America, though its exact location meandered along the coastline before settling in its current site in 1601. As the main Atlantic port of entry, Veracruz linked the colony of New Spain to the rest of the Spanish Empire through the flow of goods and individuals. Just as it was the first Spanish town in New Spain, so too was it the site of the Spanish Empire's last attack at the end of the Mexican War of Independence, thus earning the town its first heroic title. Its next three acts of heroism came not from expulsion, but through invasion. As aforementioned, Veracruz first experienced a blockade and then an invasion by the French during the Pastry War of 1838–1839. The town was then invaded twice by the United

States—once in 1847 during the Mexican–American War and again in 1914 during the Mexican Revolution. Veracruz temporarily held the seat of government from 1858–1861 under the Liberal government of President Benito Juárez during the Reform War, a three-year civil war between Conservatives and Liberals. It was in Veracruz that the dictator Porfirio Díaz took his last steps in Mexico before he entered exile at the start of the Mexican Revolution in 1911. The city was briefly the seat of power again under President Venustiano Carranza in 1914 after the withdrawal of US forces and before his return to Mexico City. While it seems that Heroica Veracruz no longer engages in acts of heroism, its importance to Mexico’s development was never merely about the temporary occupations of forces both foreign and domestic.

As the main Atlantic port of entry, colonizers, enslaved Africans, refugees, immigrants, sailors, and visitors have all passed through Veracruz, with many choosing to dwell in the city made by the sea. While the first Africans in what is now Mexico helped conquer the Aztec Triple Alliance (Restall 2000), Africans soon became an important source of enslaved labor in New Spain. Through the middle of the 17th century, nearly two-thirds of enslaved Africans were destined for New Spain (Aguirre Beltrán 1946) with the viceroyalty continuing to receive such persons throughout the colonial era (Restall 2009). As a consequence of the increased importation of enslaved Africans, the free colored population also grew with the latter group outstripping the former in the second half of the 17th century (Bennett 2009). People of African descent, both free and enslaved, lived within the walled city, in neighborhoods like La Huaca that were situated just outside of the wall, in maroon settlements like Mocambo to the south, and on lands in the surrounding area. Many of these people intermixed, creating the diversity of features noted by visitors and locals alike. They also, in turn, helped create the foundations of what is now known as jarocho culture.

The port-ness of Veracruz cannot be overstated. While it is now “an open window to the Caribbean” (Casteñada 2012), it was before a wider threshold. The flow of goods and people through the open access port created intimate relationships and fostered fictive kin between jarochos and other Caribbean populations. Whereas Paul Gilroy conceives of the Black Atlantic as ships in motion, we must also consider ships in port. For it was not through the crisscrossing of the Atlantic alone that these transatlantic ties were forged. The ships, he argues, were “the living means by which the points within the Atlantic world were joined. They were the mobile elements that stood for the shifting spaces in between the fixed places they connected” (Gilroy 1995, 16). But ships do not always move and the fixity of their ports of call vis-à-vis the ship does not necessitate a fixity within the port cities themselves.

In fact, the dynamism of those fixed places delimiting the Black Atlantic makes for a unique ethnographic stage. As Jacqueline Nassy Brown—another ethnographer of a port city—has argued, the pursuit of diaspora through place and localness has “received little attention in ethnographies about Black folk here and there” (Brown 2005, 6). Whereas localness among Brown’s interlocutors in Liverpool often conjures past realities to make contemporary claims to place through race, localness serves a slightly different function in Veracruz. While the multiple temporalities architecturally represented in the port city set the stage for the many different historical narratives that entrap jarochos (Trouillot 1995), racialized discourse derives primarily from actions rather than specific locations. The port, though dynamic, has a frequency and regularity that allows one to get her bearings. If it is true—as Henk Driessen claims—that anthropology as a discipline relies on regularity, continuity, and tradition, then the various cycles, recitations, and repetitions inherent in jarocho publics satisfy this need.

The places where blackness is most commonly discussed are regularly scheduled gatherings, even if the explicit mention of the third root is as unpredictable as a taxi driver mentioning his daughter's hair or a passerby comparing you to his deceased mother. Jarocho publics organize around scenarios that presence and instantiate blackness without notice but always within context. These scenarios make sense as sites to study blackness in Veracruz because they are where jarocho make sense of their third root. According to Diana Taylor, the scenario is a "meaning-making paradigm" that not only "structures social environments, behaviors, and potential outcomes," but also serves as a "portable framework" that through its cumulative repetitions "makes visible, yet again, what is already there: the ghosts, the images, the stereotypes" (2003, 28). These scenarios in Veracruz span fandangos, public dancing, and festivals. They gather people and presence blackness. They are where I focused my attention.

When I first met a leading figure of the son jarocho community, I was woefully uninformed about son jarocho, and slightly at a loss about what to do in Veracruz without an Afro-Mexican community as such. While he could not conjure such a group of people, he did introduce me to a group of musicians. Our introduction led me to a circle of men, learning to play a piece of music called "Los enanos" with an 8-stringed instrument called a *jarana* underneath a coconut tree and under attack by mosquitos. This group would be my introduction not only to the workshop culture, which is a focus of my study, but also the fandango culture where people collectively interpret the pieces of music called *sones*.¹¹

¹¹ Many people maintain the distinction between a *son* and a song within the son jarocho community. The rationale being that a *son* is a specific type of song that can be collectively played in the fandango space. According to the scholar and jaranero Jessica Gottfried (2009), a son is structurally different than a song in that a song has a consistency in the way it is played and sung. *Sones* are more variable and are always played slightly differently.

As a participant in this taller and a part of this community, I was able to learn how blackness is mentioned and engaged within a milieu that treats son jarocho as more than just music, but as tradition and inheritance. For jaraneros, the very music they practiced and the fandango culture they actively revive would not exist without the transculturation that occurred in the 18th century when sones were first created. While some jaraneros attempt to map blackness onto specific instrumentation, others understand it to be integral to the music itself. Across this spectrum, the third root is taken as given and necessary for the creation of the autochthonous musical tradition. The workshop structure within jarocho publics facilitate this normalization process as they disseminate both skills and historical context.

Enthusiasts of the danzón fall into two camps—those who belong to groups and those who enjoy dancing without formal training. The former population engages in their own workshop structure where choreography is taught and learned. These groups collapse the divide between practice and performance by practicing in public and treating public performances as practice for national competitions and demonstrations. While these performative events provide an end goal for workshop-goers, the Afro-Cuban history of the performance complex (Madrid and Moore 2013) also becomes important information to practice and even perform for tourists should they ask. Danzoneros who take lessons learn choreography, history, and a technique of the body (Mauss 1973) that works to discipline the very corporeality that is coded as Afro-Cuban in the service of uniformity.

This is not the case for the old-timers who come to the public squares to dance to live music as they have done prior to the boom the danzón experienced in 1991 after the release of the eponymously named movie. These freelance dancers often have a dance partner who may or may not be their sentimental partner, and regularly attend the standing engagements for the

danzón in the zócalo and in the Plazuela. For them, they do not practice the danzón in the sense of rehearsal; instead, the danzón itself is a practice, constantly done when there is a live danzonera band available to play the classic numbers. As I moved across the two communities of danzoneros, choreographed and freestyled, the choreographic practice of danzón revealed a inclination to discipline blackness in the narrative as an origin story, and in the body as a tendency to be tamed.

Public dancing to Afro-Antillean music like the danzón and son music strengthen Veracruz's reputation as a black space within a mestizo nation. They are the visible evidence of the Port's Afro-Caribbean identity. The municipal government financially supports this image by contracting the musicians for locals to dance to in the tourist-friendly *zócalo*, or main plaza. In the Plazuela, a smaller public space with less foot traffic, the municipality plays a less prominent fiscal role even as they direct tourists there as a site of authenticity. The local café owner contracts sonero groups, musicians who play son music, to perform three nights a week. The Plazuela attracts an intergenerational crowd of primarily locals who listen and dance to the music while convivially passing time with their fellow Plazuela denizens. When not playing, the musicians take advantage of their amplification to not only create a sense of irreverent intimacy, but also share information about the son music itself, alternately known as son cubano, son montuno, or son tradicional veracruzano de raíz cubana. As this last name suggests, the Cuban origin of the music is celebrated while also identifying it as a traditional Veracruz sound, further cleaving Veracruz to its sister island Cuba, which is popularly understood to be a Black space. As a regular at the Plazuela, I observed and interacted with people whose leisure practices were presented as unscripted evidence of Veracruz's Afro-Caribbean nature.

The Veracruz Institute of Culture (IVEC), as a contrast, has a very strong agenda and mandate to preserve and disseminate the local culture of the Puerto jarocho. A large portion of their calendar of events is focused on Afro-Caribbean themes, from hosting didactic fandangos to paying homages to local soneros, to hosting the International Afro-Caribbean Festival, which started in 1994. IVEC, which has various facilities around the state, maintains its main site in the port city, and its influence in the historic downtown area is far-reaching. Through its regular events, IVEC has created a population conversant on the city's blackness. While there is not necessarily a high fidelity between what the invited academics present and what locals recall, IVEC's efforts have familiarized the populace with the arguments of the Our Third Root program. Both a gathering point of jarocho publics and an official governmental voice, this jarocho public is most subject to the shifting interests of the multiculturalist state.

An Outline of This Study

The chapters unfold as follows: the first chapter, "Defining *Lo Negro* in the Port City of Veracruz," demonstrates what it means to identify with blackness rather than identify as Black. Using the son jarocho piece, "Los Negritos" as a framing device, this opening chapter tracks how locals in the city valorize, historicize, and spatialize blackness as both heredity and heritage. I develop the concept of the *pringa* of Black blood and its slippage between genetic and cultural understandings. Pringa, which translates as both a drop and a stain, harkens back to the colonial reasoning of *limpieza de sangre*, or blood purity, and the ancestry-based *casta* system that first created the jarocho identity. As a drop, the pringa is a trifle, somewhat negligible, and not a major preoccupation. A drop, however, can also be the difference maker. As a stain, it is indelible and in many ways acts to constitute the jarochos as a group. Through the pringa,

blackness becomes something all jarochos inherently possess, whether its somatic expression “skips a generation” or not. As such, I suggest that when jarochos discursively situate blackness in their past, they are not denying or distancing themselves for it; rather, they are positioning it as a commonly shared cultural resource that seeds both present and future claims to the jarocho’s localized blackness.

The second chapter, “The Presence of the Past,” explores the chronotopic quality of Veracruz to explain how contemporary jarochos use their black past to “invent” and explain contemporary traditions (Hobsbawm 1993). Following Stuart Hall (1995), I argue that jarocho publics use Veracruz’s afro-jarocho past as a cultural resource in the *rescate* of jarocho practices. This chapter takes up Stephan Palmié and Charles Stewart’s (2016) call that the anthropology of history should address any such practices that establish past relationships. As such, this chapter gives an account of afro-jarocho history through the very narrations and evidence used by contemporary jarochos. These relationships, evocatively described as “coming from centuries past,” flourish in archives and repertoires alike. The abundance of afro-jarocho¹² history reiterates the always-already motif introduced in the pringa and demonstrates how professionals and non-professionals narrate an afro-jarocho past in order to contextualize cultural practices.

The third chapter, “From Table Talk to Public Dancing,” takes a scalar approach to the investments in jarocho identity from the intimacy of table talk to the largess of Carnival. In this chapter, I argue that jarocho publics draw on stereotypes and characteristics of the jarocho that originate from when it was an ethnoracial term, rather than from its broadest application where anyone from the state of Veracruz is jarocho. By working across scales, this chapter unpacks the

¹² I use this term to indicate the period during which jarocho primarily referred to people of African descent and in distinction from its current regionalized usage.

burden of stereotypes and the work involved in performing jarocho-ness to demonstrate how blackness is smuggled into the present and future through preoccupation with regional authenticity. It explores the idea of performance through the distinction John Jackson Jr. (2005) makes between sincerity and authenticity, arguing that jarochos sincerely reckon with their understanding of blackness in order to be more jarocho, rather than to be Black. With this framework and an expansive view of performance, I demonstrate how the use of stereotypes founded in afrojarochos ultimately make blackness historical and cultural rather than biological. Throughout the chapter, I develop *rescate* as an analytic by exploring the ways jarocho publics treat their intangible patrimony as precarious while insisting that it is alive. The chapter that follows continues in this vein with a focus on practicing rather than performing afro-jarocho blackness.

In the fourth chapter, “Practicing Blackness,” I tack between two workshop cultures—the *danzón* and *son jarocho*—to highlight the commonalities these jarocho publics share with regards to blackness. Such commonalities include rhythm, narrative, repertoire, and didactic performance. All fashion blackness into something that is both learnable and internal, thus creating a tension between innateness and mastery. I argue that the workshop is a re-creational space of the jarocho. Its repetitive nature has not only facilitated the *rescate* of the jarocho, but also has vivified the social factness of afrojarochero heritage and history. This chapter draws heavily on Diana Taylor (2003)’s analytic of the scenario as a meaning-making, portable framework. The chapter complements the previous one’s focus on performance, arguing that the transmission of afrojarochero knowledge, memory, and identity often occurs through practice as a performance. It ends by attending to the jarocho publics who do not participate in the workshop

culture and how their transmission of history and culture offer a different avenue for the rescue of the jarocho.

The final chapter, “The Coming Age of the Afro-Mexican” highlights the changing political tide heralded by the 2015 mid-census survey and the formal recognition of Afro-Mexican as a political category. I argue that the new turn toward enumerable blackness could represent a sharp pivot away from the jarocho publics’ understanding of blackness as a shared cultural resource. Unlike the Third Root Movement and the multiculturalism of the 1980s and early 1990s from whence it derived, the new multicultural moment primarily concerns itself with rights and recognition. The logic of the census question, however, with its emphasis on history, culture, and traditions, lends itself to the earlier logics of multiculturalism, thus resulting in an overly-burdened question. I argue this pivot will require qualitative unpacking rather than just quantitative analysis. In the end, this chapter questions how the presencing of jarochos’ blackness will adapt to the 2020 census on the horizon.

At a moment when Mexico’s ethnoracial landscape is shifting, this research urges us to reconsider how we understand and engage with what we call race. The Our Third Root program engendered two paths—one as explored in this dissertation that focuses on cultural blackness, and another that treats Afro-Mexicans as the embodiment of the third root. This latter approach brings Mexico on par with most of the region and aligns with the goals of the United Nations’ International Decade of People of African Descent. Ideally, this will lead to material improvements for Afro-Mexicans who have been marginalized and othered in their home country. However, something is potentially lost in the abandonment of blackness as a collectively shared cultural resource. As the Age of the Afro-Mexican becomes hegemonic, it

remains an open question what will happen with these jarocho publics, these communities who identify with their Afro-Caribbean heritage but do not yet identify as Black.

CHAPTER ONE: DEFINING *LO NEGRO* IN THE PORT CITY OF VERACRUZ

“Blackness, too, is slippery—ever beyond the reach of one’s grasp. Once you think you have a hold on it, it transforms into something else and travels in another direction. Its elusiveness does not preclude one from trying to fix it, to pin it down, however—for the pursuit of authenticity is inevitably an emotional and moral one.”

—E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness*

Defining blackness in Veracruz is indeed a slippery endeavor. Following the twists and turns makes for a confounding journey through various sites within the city and into its surroundings. Individuals contradict their words with their actions. Directions are given with unearned confidence, and suggestions are made. Success feels imminent, and there is just enough hope to keep you interested in the task. Fred Moten (2017) deems the recitation of the sentence “blackness is *x*” a “devotional practice,” and indeed pursuing that *x* feels like it could only be done by faith alone.

In the spirit of ethnographic sincerity (Jackson 2010), I open this study by taking you along this quixotic journey. Through it, you will find that no one “[had] information that [could] simply be called up and expressed in discursive statements,” though many made their best attempt (Fabian 1990, 6). The question and the expectation were wrong. In the end, much of the information that I garnered, could only be “made present” through “action, enactment, or performance” (6). In this way, I found myself in agreement with Johannes Fabian’s belief that the ethnographer’s role is often to be “a provider of occasions, a catalyst in the weakest sense, and a producer (in analogy to a theatrical producer) in the strongest” (7). What follows, then, is the drama—or comedy, really—of searching for *los negros* in Veracruz and instead finding *lo negro*. In the process, you get a sense of the place called Veracruz and the place of blackness within it.

*Si por negro me desprecias
Porque negro es mi color
Entre lo blanco y lo negro
Lo negro siempre es mejor¹*

“The Black race is strong for the climate but weak for the genetic issue. That’s why you no longer find Black people in Veracruz,” Ramón concluded. As the sweat rolled down my face, I could not help but wonder how he was doing in this heat if my black ancestry somehow put me at an advantage. The three fans in his recently inherited office above the City Museum did little more than create a low hum and competing currents of hot air. They did absolutely nothing for the infamous *bochorno* of Veracruz, that enveloping heat that so often swaddles the port city. Ramón used my African-American person to clarify his point and explained that if I were to marry a *giüero*, or white person, there would be a fifty-fifty chance that our child would be white. If that child were to also marry a white person, my hypothetical grandchild would definitely be white.

However, he did not dwell in hypotheticals. For him, the history of Afro-descendants in Veracruz proved the point. The Afro-descendant people of yesteryear were not socially exclusive, according to Ramón. Indeed, they were active participants in the process of mixture called *mestizaje*. As a result of this process, “You encounter *morenos* or even white people, people very white with *pelo chino*, with thick lips and flat noses—with negroid features but with

¹The interspersed lyrics are from the *son* “Los negritos.” They serve as both a framing device and as evidence of the ambivalence with which blackness is treated—alternating between valorization and stereotyping. This verse translates as follows: If you look down on me because black is my color, between the white and the black, the black is always better.

white skin.”² Admitting that his own “negroid” features “ya no son tantos,” he nevertheless drew my attention to his *moreno*, or brown, complexion and acknowledged that if he were to grow out his closely-cropped hair, the *pelo chino*, or curly hair, that he inherited from his father would be more apparent. Though his features were now “not so many,” they still represented for him the vestiges of his black heritage that have survived the vagaries of mixture and genetics. Such features are still present throughout the port, though the people who he would identify as *negro* are few and far between. According to Ramón, this explains the near disappearance of the black race in the port city: weak genes and half a millennium of mixture.

*Gurumbé, gurumbé
Gurumbé, gurumbé
De teque manequé
Chuchú mayembe³*

I met El Vate Veracruzano through his efforts to revitalize the Afro-Caribbean history and culture in the port city. He was curating “a look” for his video promoting the historic neighborhood known as the Barrio de La Huaca, and I happened to fit the part. That is how I found myself smiling on a stoop in front of one of the iconic colorful wooden facades as I pantomimed playing a tiny marimba. Had I been wearing the large hoop earrings and headscarves of some of his other subjects, all the better. His emphasis on looks not only perpetuates an ideal-type vision of what is Afro-Caribbean about Veracruz but also sharply contrasts with his own features. His pale skin and ginger stubble do not visually evoke the blackness he is committed to elevating in the popular culture and consciousness of locals. Due to

²“Encuentras morenos o inclusivos blancos, gente muy blanca de pelo chino, de labios gruesos y nariz chata—con rasgos negroides pero ya su piel es de color blanco.”

³ There is no translation for this. In fact, many musicians in the son jarocho tradition simply describe them as “African words.”

that dissonance as well as the baldness of his ambitions, some other people in the culture industry have derisively referred to him as a *negrito blanco*, which roughly translates as a little black white guy.

He prefers the term *negrito mexicano*—not for just himself, but rather for all locals of Veracruz, who are often called *jarochos*. According to him, *jarochos* are the little black Mexicans in the national imaginary. While El Vate believes there are Afro-Mexicans in Veracruz, he also maintains his label applies to all *jarochos* on the basis of their history and culture. To support this opinion, he readily recites lists of terms, foodstuffs, and musical lyrics that for him prove the Afro-Caribbean presence in his local culture. Unlike Ramón, he never gestured to his features as evidence of his black heritage. Instead, he relied on cultural forms. And yet there is still a reason he wanted me in particular to pretend to play a marimba on a stoop in La Huaca, smiling from ear to ear.

These examples demonstrate the coexisting understandings of *lo negro*, or blackness, in Veracruz. In either case it functions as a birthright by heredity or heritage—oftentimes both. For example, even someone like El Vate, who primarily focuses on the shared, intangible black heritage possessed by all *jarochos*, relies on recognizable signifiers such as dress to render that heritage visible. He calls the *jarochos* the Black Mexicans not because they are Afro-Mexicans, but because he associates the traditions and happiness that he valorizes as quintessentially *jarocho* with blackness. El Vate, with his lists of words and book knowledge, nevertheless solicited a person who was clearly not from there to capture something that has not yet disappeared, something he considers to be fundamental to the local culture.

Blackness-as-genes and blackness-as-culture live independent, elaborate lives that converge and diverge in an instant. They are effectively the difference between *los negros*, black people, and *lo negro*, that which has the quality of being black. Changing the article from *los* to *lo* signals a move from the tangible to the abstract, but the shift is not complete, especially among my interlocutors—those who actively work to propagate popular culture with African antecedents. For example, the same Ramón who unequivocally said that it is hard to find Black people in Veracruz could easily point to the telltale signs of African ancestry in himself and in others.

The contradiction between words and actions in these unsolicited moments reveal more than the half-baked answers I would receive when I explicitly asked people about the Afro-Mexicans in Veracruz. Such a question was varyingly met with confusion, with an impulse to please, with deflection, or with enthusiasm. The problem was the question. It was too small, too closed for the contradiction bundled within it. Only through embracing the slippery significance of Veracruz's black heritage as both hereditary and cultural, as well as both individual and collective, can one begin to understand what blackness means for people who hold the space of Mexico's "negrito" in a place where "you can no longer find Black people."

*Jesús María que me espanta'
Como hacen los negros pa' trabaja'
Cortando caña sin descansa'
Ja ja ja já, ja ja ja já⁴*

Roberto and I sat by the window in the café La Merced, leaning a bit close to hear each other above the din. Between the clinking of stainless steel spoons on thick-walled glasses, the

⁴ Jesus Mary it shocks me how Black people work, cutting sugarcane without resting. [Laughter]

release of steam from the cafeteria machines, the conversations occurring throughout, and the rustling of newspapers with the masthead of my interlocutor's employer, our slight inclination toward each other was warranted. But had it been silent, there is a good chance the confidential lean would have made an appearance anyway. You see, we had gotten on the topic of where to find Black people. Before long, Roberto shifted from his confidential lean forward to a confident lean back. This too, was common comportment among the tellers of such tales. The confidential stance gives whatever location suggested a rumor-like quality while the shift back attempts to solidify rumor into fact. Roberto for his part located Black people in Yanga, Veracruz. Despite his conspiratorial affect, I was not wholly surprised. Yanga is the most commonly cited location of Black people in Veracruz. When I asked him if he had ever been to Yanga, he said he had not but insisted that Yanga's fame spoke for itself. Rather than going to the source, Roberto the newspaperman had relied on hearsay.

While Yanga boasts the highest name recognition, it is not the only community rumored to have Afro-descendants. To the north in the Actopan region near the state capital of Xalapa is a town called El Coyolillo (Martínez Maranto 1994) with a sign at its entrance proclaiming it to be an "afromestiza community." While the community and its blackness are the subject of an entire special edition of the African Diaspora journal *Callaloo* (Jones and Rowell Winter 2004), an anthropologist who works in the community revealed to me that the sign proclaiming an afromestiza identity was not a grassroots effort, but rather the project of local university students. Places of academic interest often leave residents to live beside these literal signposts of an African past (Lewis 2000). To the south in the isthmus of the state is Chacalapa, another afromestizo community, which was originally formed exclusively for people of African descent (Hoffmann 2010). There are other towns and communities throughout Veracruz with names like

La Matamba, Mandinga, Mozomboa, Mocambo, and Mozambique that those in the port city presume to have sizeable Afro-Mexican populations largely based on their name. These small towns span the map of the state and capture most of the imagined blackness therein, a labor that supports the theory that rural places embrace their African heritage while urban places deny it (Jones 2013). People know that there has been and continues to be an expectation to find people of African descent in Veracruz. It just so happens that Yanga provides the perfect placeholder to concentrate those expectations. By having a past that is both well-known and heroic, Yanga possesses a certitude and solidity that is often lacking in other communities around the state. Moreover, with it being located just over an hour from the Port, the place is accessible despite its almost mythic qualities.

One weekend my friend Verónica and I made the short journey by bus to this place where black people are known to reside. As we approached the town center, we passed under a sign proclaiming Yanga “The first free town in the Americas” and passed by the empty plaza on the outskirts where a large statue to the town’s eponymous founder was erected in the 1970s. Eventually we made our way to the tourism office located on the second floor of city hall where the historian on staff dutifully recounted the history of the maroon leader Yanga and his people’s rebellion against the Spanish forces. Because the Spanish forces could not defeat the guerilla tactics of the maroons, the two sides eventually entered into a treaty, thus founding the first free town in the Americas. While I would later learn that this historian’s own research suggests a more intriguing story of local interests, patronage, and power, he nevertheless presented to us the official story, which he has since called a Disneyfied version of the truth. By his analysis, the success experienced by Yanga and his community is best explained not by a marooned, isolated existence, but rather by interpersonal connections between Yanga and a highly influential family

with property in the surrounding area. Nevertheless, on our first meeting he shared the story I have heard on every visit to the town from historians and passersby alike. On this visit, however, he augmented this classic story with a recommendation of another elsewhere to visit, a more perfect site to find *los negros* of Veracruz.

“Nowadays there aren’t any people of color here [in Yanga],” the historian told us. His wording was slightly different from Ramón’s, but the sentiment was the same. With a gesture toward the tourism magazine about Yanga he had given us earlier, he explained that what made Yanga special was not that it had a sizeable population of Afro-descendants, but rather that it had a heroic Black history. He informed us that there were some *gente de color*⁵—which is the polite expression many prefer to use for Afro-descendants—in the nearby town of Mata Clara (Cruz Carretero 1989), but there was also a small community nearby in the sugarcane fields to which his taxi driver cousin could take us. Agreeing, we took the short trip up a hill into a more rural area, passing more sugarcane than people. This small community did not have a center and was little more than a dusty road flanked by houses. With a warning that it would be best to take the next bus we see because it might be our last opportunity, the taxi driver cousin bid us farewell and went on his way.

On the side of the road in the place identified as truly Black by a resident of the most famously Black town in Veracruz, we started walking in a direction that looked promising. There were not many people out and about, but just as we were beginning to give up on this impromptu side trip, we saw a man cresting the hill with a load on his shoulder. He was tall, broad, and as Verónica said, “moreno-moreno,” the doubling of the descriptor a common technique to connote emphasis and degree. In other words, he was exceptionally dark-skinned. I remember thinking he

⁵ People of color

could have been the body model for the imposing statue of Yanga we had passed earlier, or at least a shoe-in to play the part if there were ever a community play. Because his bundle looked substantial, we did not disturb his journey. Besides, we were under the impression that he would be one of many. We were wrong. That man on the road was the only “negrito” we saw in the small community. Everyone else we encountered looked like the people we had seen in Yanga which is to say like the people we had left in the Port. There was nothing particularly “negrito” about this community. Had we imagined the man with the load? Was his load in fact our expectations and not the wood it had appeared to be? Eventually we found our way back to Veracruz, Verónica more disappointed than I.

Verónica does not consider herself to be Afro-Mexican but is fascinated that there is rumored Black ancestry in her husband’s family. She even mentioned to me in passing that she had wondered how her own children would turn out. “They say it skips a generation,” she has told me on more than one occasion. Although she was an eager travel companion, the topic of Black people is an idle fancy rather than a preoccupation. She still listens in for rumors of where there are communities of Black people, but the trials of finishing her degree, of starting a new late-life career, of raising children whose appearance suggest that more than one generation is skipped, are more pressing issues in her everyday life. Yet every so often we reminisce about that time we looked for black people and she reminds me of her husband’s grandmother. The woman was “morena-morena” and “chinita-chinita” as family lore goes.⁶ Verónica is not exactly sure of which town she was from, but we are seasoned adventurers after all. And there is always an elsewhere to go and “find” a community of color.

⁶ This is to say that she was darker skinned with tightly coiled hair.

Even as these smaller locations loom large in the collective imagination of those in the Port, also known as *porteños*, the metonymic relationship between the city of Veracruz and state that shares its name means the port city also carries an expectation for blackness. Added to this is the Afro-Caribbean reputation of the port which is not shared by the smaller, more isolated towns and communities to which many *porteños* so quickly point. This impulse to point elsewhere is part of a broader phenomenon that treats blackness as something in relative instead of absolute terms. Something or someone is identified as black in comparison to rather than irrespective of another entity. As Tanya Golash-Boza (2010) argues based on her work with an Afro-descended population in Peru, although the word “black” can be used as both a racial and a color label, there is a conceptual distinction between the two uses. Whereas the former is mutually exclusive and refers to a group with physical, cultural, and ancestral traits in common, the latter is not mutually exclusive and describes gradations of skin color. In Veracruz, the word black primarily functions as a color label rather than a racial one. Thus “negro” can be used to describe someone, though often not the person with whom you are speaking.

It animates what ethnographer Christina Sue characterizes as a “wild goose chase” for Black people in the Port. Sue relied on locals to identify “negritos” whom she would then interview about race and racial categorization. However, she found that these informants would almost unfailingly disavow the descriptor placed on them and offer a more appropriate candidate, thus continuing her chase (Sue 2010, 273-274). While Sue’s method of using local actors’ discernments points to the ways in which blackness is in flux and always in sight but out of grasp, it only captures the use of negro or black as a category, even as it slips frustratingly between being a racial or a color label. The move from “los negros” to “lo negro” eschews the goose chase, as productive as it may be. Even in Sue’s experience, there was never a disavowal

that the goose exists, but rather that there are more perfect models to be had. Living within the expectation of blackness creates its own calculus of when or how to point to an elsewhere. By staying within the Port and abstaining from the goose chase, my object of study—*lo negro*—remains slippery, but in a different way.

Blackness is not only relative, it is also locatable. Such a perspective perpetuates the tendency to spatialize race in the African diaspora (Busdiecker 2009; Brown 2005; Godreau 2002; Rahier 1998), and maps the reach of the African Diaspora onto communities who contemporarily self-identify as Afro-descendants. The spatialization of Mexico's blackness onto Veracruz and the Costa Chica of Oaxaca and Guerrero in part accounts for my and other ethnographers' focus on Veracruz at all. However, the spatialization of race is not strictly or even primarily a feature of academic inquiry. It is also part and parcel of nation-building and internalized narratives of the imagined national community and the (mis)placement of blackness within. When blackness is spatialized, it does not make sense outside of the presupposed locations, thus protecting the rest of the nation from the threat it poses (Sharman 2001). Isar P. Godreau (2006) has argued that discursive distance plays an important role in the construction of blackness as apart from rather than a part of the nation. According to Godreau, distancing places blackness in an elsewhere be it at a geographical, corporeal, or temporal remove. The emphasis on smaller towns with African names, the supposition of having African ancestry based on hair grade, and the celebration of a heroic past filled with Afro-descendant actors are but a sampling of the types of discursive distancing in Veracruz. Such techniques are often read as denials or disavowals in Afro-Mexican studies (cf. Sue 2010; R. A. Hall 2008; Jones 2013). However, rather than interpreting racial distancing amidst the cloud of expectation as a denial, I view it is a useful reminder that though our locus of study is not the object of our study (Geertz 1973, 22),

location matters in explicit and implicit ways. The discursive distance is never very far. It is local, often proprietary, and usually telling of Veracruz. Temporally locating blackness in the past more fully enplaces it in the present and makes more certain its future.

Public discourse about blackness has existed in Veracruz, the *Puerto jarocho*, for nearly a generation. Since the creation of the “Nuestra Tercera Raíz” program in the late 1980s, cultural promoters in the Port have disseminated the ways in which an African heritage—alongside the Spanish and Indigenous contributions—is “our third root”.⁷ While academics spearheaded the program, the message has been internalized by many of the city’s inhabitants. The program’s introduction to the port is largely credited to the renowned academic of Afro-Mexico, Dra. Luz María Martínez Montiel. During her tenure as director of the City Museum, she commissioned the installation of the nation’s first museum exhibition dedicated to slavery in Mexico. While the exhibition room has since been repurposed and the interpretation of the third root inflected through the Caribbean (Hoffmann and Rinaudo 2014), there remains a generalized understanding that there were *negros* in Veracruz and that they populate a collectively shared past. Due to the efforts of various academics, Veracruz has re-membered its past with Africans and their descendants despite the common refrain that there are currently very few, if any, *negros* in the populace. Rather than creating black subjects, these third root discourses are hailing something that many consider to be already there.

Cultural promoters and consumers alike have taken hold of the possessive pronoun of the program’s name through their persistent and concerted reflection on their connection to these people in the past. Ramón, for example, almost unfailingly mentions “our third root” when he acts

⁷<http://www.nacionmulticultural.unam.mx/AfroamericaPruebaVer02/antecedentes/index.html>

as a master of ceremony for any tangentially relevant forum or conference, despite his use of third person plural forms to refer to black people during our discussion in his office. Yet there seems to be neither a script nor a consensus among those in the culture industry. For instance, I once witnessed a disagreement among colleagues who both worked in the educational divisions of their respective institutions under the auspices of IVEC. Julia, overhearing Javier retelling the African past to me, interrupted to insist that there were no enslaved persons within the city of Veracruz. Urban slavery did not find purchase in her view of slavery, which was confined to the sugar production and animal husbandry of the hinterland. Although conceding that there was strong interplay between the city and the outskirts, she maintained the sanctity of Veracruz itself.

While at the time I silently thought to myself that she should know better, it is true that plantation slavery and the cowboy culture of the *sotavento* region get the lion's share of the focus.⁸ The urban/rural divide, in that sense, is not just a contemporary phenomenon. Even the museum panels that have replaced Dra. Martínez Montiel's room on slavery provide an overview of how the third root has impacted a generalized jarocho culture without narrowing its focus on the Port itself. In the panel tracing the origins of the local identity marker *jarocho*, the museum-goer learns that the term originally referred to Afro-mestizo people of the sotavento region of the state. The African root is given particular attention within the triracial group. In fact, the Spanish and Indigenous roots are not unpacked at all. Instead, the panel presents a narrative in which the African ancestry is necessary but insufficient in creating the jarocho archetype. Additionally, it is only in this panel where the jarocho type is discussed, intimating that this hereditary mixture is also responsible for the character traits of jarochos being lively,⁹ sensual, and loud.

⁸ The sotavento region is a geographic region of central-south Veracruz.

⁹ I originally translated *alegre* as "happy," but my opinion on how to gloss this term is evolving.

Individuals often claim a personal connection to the jarocho's collectively shared black past, thus further facilitating the slippage between heritage and heredity. On the one hand, the Africans of the past are seen in the vestiges they left behind—in the lists of words and foodstuffs El Vate and others recite, in the intangible essence that makes the jarochos the way they are, in the aggressive insistence on their lively attitude. On the other hand, the Africans of the collective past are often rendered personal. Many who identify as an unmarked Mexican still reflect that they “should have”—which is to say, “must have”—some Black ancestor down the line. Memories, rumors, and even nicknames about great-grandparents and great-great grandparents never met become the link to these ancestral *negros* that occupied Veracruz. The genealogies of porteños are littered with such figures, varyingly identified as Cuban, chino, or simply “remarkably tall and strong.”

The ideology of mestizaje and its erasure of blackness have not created an erasure of possibility. The antiblackness embedded in mestizaje has been assumed to result in a plausible deniability; think Carl Degler's (1971) “mulatto escape hatch.” Certain features can be explained away with the indiscriminate mixing of people. In Veracruz, escape is not the only option. Rather than simply creating the conditions for a plausible deniability, the public discourse about the black heritage and black past of Veracruz also makes plausible claims of black ancestry. Very few people know for certain their genealogy which is why for many locals blackness becomes a “should have” with either appearance or preference backward engineered to actualize that “should.” It has created an environment in which the mapping of certain features to an unknown-but-likely black ancestor borders reification. It is as if being *chino* can only have

been caused by a black ancestor, as if there are no Spaniards or indigenous people with tightly coiled hair. It is as if being *bullanguero*¹⁰ is only in the purview of Black people.

Because the various ways in which jarochos both understand and deploy *negro* are not easily or readily demarcated, misrecognition is an ongoing possibility across the differing racial logics of the United States and Mexico. Anthropologist John Hartigan refers to this difference as “a substantive fault line across which generalizations and abstractions about [race’s] significance, scope, and characteristics become tenuous” (Hartigan 2013, 29), but such a reading is not a foregone conclusion. The tenuous nature of this type of research is in part due to what Karen E. and Barbara J. Fields have termed “racecraft”, the circular logic that animates the social construction of this thing called race. The doubt expressed by Hartigan is a reminder that not only is race a social construct, local culture dictates not only how it is constructed, but also its salience. In other words, while the Fieldses use the United States to generate their theory of racecraft, any given place would have its own circular logic at play.

This is because racecraft refers to the “mental terrain” and “pervasive belief” that originate in human imagination, human action, and the relationship between the two. It is tempting for anyone, academics and non-academics alike, to assume that the imagined is the actual, particularly with something as consequential as race. It is a temptation born out of a mundanity that renders it as something that is known intimately, but not well (Fields and Fields 2012, 22-23). However, this temptation is not the special prerogative of critical race theory and is in fact the struggle and opportunity inherent in ethnography. For this reason, Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant’s pushback against the reading of racism in Latin American contexts is overblown. While skepticism has its uses, their argument that a US-born or US-trained scholar of

¹⁰ Rowdy, loud.

race perpetrates “cultural imperialism” or “ethnographic intrusions” when contemplating the anti-blackness and anti-Indianness embedded in the racial ideologies of Latin America is largely unfounded (1999, 41-44). The fault line may be tenuous, but it is not impassable. Understanding the circular logic of the various racecrafts in Latin America is fundamental to understanding how blackness functions both there and in the United States. Moreover, the theorization of race in the Americas has always been a conversation between the regions dubbed “North” and “Latin” (Hooker 2017).

The “topographical features” of the “mental terrain” that Latin Americans traverse in their own versions of racecraft may be different from those present in the United States, but there is value in differing perspectives. To know something intimately but not well is to create the “thicks and thins” of a text one writes without being able to read (de Certeau 1984, 93). The topographical features are written through their traversal, which is why searching for “Black people” becomes a wild goose chase; the directions are being written, not read. There is an improvisational quality to these discernments. However, as the most virtuosic improviser knows, the freedom of improvisation does not mean the absence of structure (Berliner 1994). When interrogating the structure within which Mexicans write the significance of blackness, one need not resort to the US-derived racial logics, which Bourdieu and Wacquant refer to as the cunning of imperial reason (1999). Instead, one must consider the cunning of colonial reason.

*El negro ha de ser bembón
Y de la nalga bole'a
Que sin esa condición
El negro no vale na'*¹¹

¹¹ The black person must be big-lipped, and shiny-bottomed. Without that condition the black person is worthless.

Fidel is not Black. His dark skin is due to his time in the sun; his distinctive afro he sometimes pulls back into a neat ponytail so that his four-cornered hat can fit snugly on his head is a calling card, not tea leaves to read him as *negro*. His sister, after all, has wavy hair, and his own curl pattern was loose, especially compared to my own. It did not matter that he has been featured prominently in a book about the particular type of *mestizaje* the coast of Veracruz is known for, a type of mixture that prominently includes the so-called third root or African presence in Mexico.¹² After all, he did not truly have control of the way in which his image was used to bolster the already-known quality of Veracruz, the fact that it has a sizable population of Afro-descended persons—always had, and at least in the imagination of a nation, always would. Never mind Fidel’s prominence in the *jaranero* community¹³ requires him to move within a community of people who conversant on the African root in their folk culture.

Now that the Mexican government is formally recognizing its population of African descent, sometimes in my spare moments I think about Fidel and wonder how he will decide whether he considers himself to be Afro-Mexican now that it is a politically inhabitable identity. I think of how he would answer the census taker, of how the census taker would have to faithfully record whatever answer he decided to make on that occasion. I think about whether it will be an in-the-moment decision. *According to history, culture, and tradition, do you consider yourself black, that is to say Afro-Mexican or Afro-descendant?* (INEGI 2015). It is a fairly straightforward question, focus-grouped and vetted to not let assumptions about race or phenotypic expressions determine the response.

¹² It is a coffee table book called *México: El Otro Mestizaje* (2011).

¹³ This is the group of musicians and enthusiasts that practice the traditional ways of playing and experiencing the folkloric genre native to the region known as *son jarocho*. They identify themselves in contradistinction to the more theatrical presentation of the same body of music.

Had Fidel not looked like—and served as—the poster child of the emergent Afro-Mexican ideal type, I would have still wondered how he would respond to the census question. As a prominent jaranero, he is well-versed and practiced in the ways in which local culture and traditions have a strong and undeniable debt to the enslaved Africans and their descendants who lived, loved, survived, and faced life together along the southern coastal plains of Veracruz, Mexico. For these reasons and more, I would have still wondered, but admittedly, perhaps less so. The common sense understanding of black as residing in the features, in the obvious, in the large afro and dark skin, is a hard assumption to shake. Fidel, after all, could not shake it either. Even as he was literally being used as visual evidence of the third root in Veracruz, he cleaved quite closely to a prescriptive verse from the son “Los Negritos.” The verse tells us a black person should be big-lipped and shiny-bottomed. Without this condition, the black person is worth nothing. I cannot speak of Fidel’s behind, but his lips were not remarkably thick. Especially compared to his hair. Nevertheless, I wonder what he will tell the census worker. After all, he is the same person who reflected that “*todos tenemos una pringa de negro.*”

We all have a droplet of black. The word “blood” fell off the sentence much in the same way that the ending syllables fall off some of the words here, in what people call a Caribbean accent. Never mind the fact that the Caribbean is miles away from the port city. *Que sin esa condición el negro no vale na’*. Without being fat-lipped and shiny-bottomed, the black person is worthless. Fidel had used that verse to describe how a black person stereotypically looks. Unlike Ramón who used our corporeality as reference, Fidel relied on the lyrics he has sung both professionally and socially as a jaranero. We all rely on what is familiar to us. And yet, despite our long conversation in which he steadfastly held blackness as an object at a remove, he, like Ramón, confided that he probably had black ancestry. “*Todos tenemos una pringa de negro.*”

Pringa is a telling word—it is a droplet, a trifle of substance. It is also a stain. It is the jarocho analogue to the one-drop rule, one of a different order to be sure. The *pringa* Fidel has—that everyone has, apparently—does not follow the US convention of hypodescent. It does not assign one of mixed ancestry to the socially subordinate group. Nevertheless, it is in its own way an irreversible mark, one that generates a groupness (Brubaker 2002) implied in Fidel’s royal we.

As Ramón’s theory of weak genes implies, the racial logic defining blackness and mixture does not align with that of the United States. Whereas hypodescent accommodates mixture within blackness, *negro* operates as a pure category. Therefore, a drop of any other ancestry precludes the categorization of *negro* while not necessarily disavowing the possession of black ancestry. People can eschew both the identity marker Black and the color label black while conceding that they are Afro-descendant, though that term is not used in everyday conversation. What is more, the fact that the *pringa* can be considered either genetic or metaphorical, representing heredity and heritage in various degrees, means that those who would not even identify as Afro-descendant can still lay claim to having that *pringa*. This is the primary difference between the one-drop rule of the United States and the *pringa* of Veracruz. Whereas the former dictates who you are, the latter explains how you are.

Fidel’s *pringa* encapsulates the ways in which folk notions of blood (Fields and Fields 2012), foundational racial logics, and essentialisms create the slippages inherent in the way *lo negro* vacillates between heredity and heritage. On the one hand, the *pringa* is an allusion to a hereditary tie to *negros*. After all, I was not speaking with Fidel about whether he was fun-loving. I was speaking to him about whether he considered himself Black. Likewise, the presumption that one “should have” black ancestry somewhere down the line is the attempt to reconcile knowledge of the large population of Afro-descendants in the past with the relatively

small population found today. However, while the *pringa* reconciles the unknowability of having African ancestry, it is not the stuff of plasma, platelets, and other blood cells. Rather, it is metaphorical blood that facilitates the collective imagining of blackness that hangs in the air like the humidity for which the town is infamous. And while it is “always already that thing that happens in the blood”, it is not quite, as Sharon Patricia Holland argues, “a crude understanding of race” (2012, 3). This *pringa* and the regular invocation of blood do reproduce “a project of belonging” (3), but while it is racialized it is not quite racial. That is to say, the allusions both oblique and acute to blackness, specifically blackness as “always already that thing that happens in the blood,” work in the service of jarochos’ regional and distinctive identity rather than the service of a racial identity per se. Yet the regularity with which jarochos invoke blood to explain or justify their self, be it phenotypically or culturally, proves that blood does more than just sustain lives in the Port. It sustains lifeways.

This *pringa* carries scripts that both outstrip genetics and predate the contemporary moment. In fact, the scripts are written into the *raza cósmica* theorized by José Vasconcelos, a nationalistic ideology that is most often credited as the first erasure of Mexico’s blackness. Despite that reputation, Vasconcelos took time to mention “the drop put in [Mexican] blood by the Black, eager for sensual joy, intoxicated with dances and unbridled lust” within the formulation of his cosmic race (Vasconcelos and Jaén 1997, 23). Although he mentions this drop in passing, it is chockfull of essentialisms that persist today in the stereotype of the jarocho—in what El Vate and others consider to be the base of their local culture. In other words, what Vasconcelos imagines as a concession in the mestizo is fundamental to the jarocho. The stereotype of the jarocho, which originated in a population for which “black blood” was significantly more than a *pringa*, has survived the “whitening” of the stereotype (Hoffmann and

Rinaudo 2014), and animates the current “blackening” of it. It will probably survive whatever comes next. Jarocho were originally the local iteration of a broader Latin American process called *zambaje*, which was the mixture of indigenous people and people of African descent that was largely outside of the ambit of the peninsulares and criollos (Whitten 2007). Now it is primarily a regional term assigned to anyone who is born in Veracruz.¹⁴ While the definition of the jarocho has broadened from its colonial origin, the colonial logics shed light on the ways in which both *negro* and jarocho are identified and inhabited. Remember, a *pringa* is not just a droplet; it is also a stain.

*Estaba bañado al negro
Para ver si se componía
Y entre más le enjabonaba
Más negro se me ponía*¹⁵

The *múcara*¹⁶ peeking through the discolored, cracked walls of the colonial buildings in the historic center is not the only vestige of New Spain in contemporary Veracruz. The notions of ancestry are as old and no less foundational. Although the *Sentimientos de la Nación* abolished the castas with the establishment of Mexico’s independence, echoes of the casta system can be heard in the rationalizations people rely on to describe their relationship to blackness vis-à-vis their features, their preferences, and their family. The way that blackness slips between heritage and heredity and back again echoes the way in which phenotypic expression and social identity worked together to locate a person’s casta within the messiness of indiscriminate mixing. Mestizaje as an ideology gives primacy to the mixed ancestry of the

¹⁴ Actually who or what is a jarocho is a nuanced and highly contested point. Regardless the first and most innocuous response to the question of who is a jarocho elicits this broad response. More discussion on the jarocho in the next chapter.

¹⁵ I was washing a black person to see if it gets better and the more I lathered, the blacker he became.

¹⁶ *Múcara* is the local term for the stony coral that was used as building material during the colonial era.

Mexican, hence elevating the mestizo, formerly a casta term for a person of equal Indigenous and Spanish descent, into the quintessential citizen. In so doing, it theoretically flattens where the casta system sought to impose a hierarchy. This post-Revolutionary ideology of mixing has been internalized almost completely among the population; yet vestiges of colonial reasoning regarding ancestry and purity remain. The post-*Reconquista* peninsular preoccupation with *limpieza de sangre*, or blood purity, adapted to this process of mixing, focusing less on the purity from Judaism or Islam and more on the purity of the Spanish lineage (Martínez 2008). Colonial reference to *raza* is best understood as lineages rather than the English cognate race, though the phenotypic expressions that we currently gloss as race factored into the assessment of one's *raza*. In addition to what one looked like, one's *calidad*, which encompassed one's social identity, helped to locate one within the social order being negotiated in New Spain (Carrera 1998). The variance in this alchemy only progressed as the castas increasingly carved out their own positionality in the colonial societal structure. Because identity was negotiable, it was also performative (Taylor 2003), ultimately relying more on perception than physical characteristics (Seed 1982). The orderliness depicted in the casta painting series of the late 18th century was aspirational at best. Rather than illustrating a lived reality, they worked to construct one (Carrera 2003). This same reliance on both biological markers and social uptake presents itself in the fluidity of who is or is not *negro* today.

The contemporary contradiction of *lo negro* as both genetic and as *je ne sais quoi* is held in tension but not in conflict as these leftover logics work within the racial ideology of mestizaje. “Todos tenemos una pringa” because to be Mexican is inherently to be mixed. However, Fidel's allusion to black blood falls outside of the traditional mestizo formulation. The jarocho compulsion to incorporate blackness—“our third root”—both complicates the ideological origin

of Mexican mestizaje while also reanimating the colonial prejudices of African ancestry. On the one hand, the way in any mixture quickly moves one away from the descriptor *negro* reflects the way in which distinct categories of personhood in the colonial era begat wholly new categories. The nearly uninhabitable quality of *negro* or Black mirrors the pureness assigned to the original groups from which the castas descended. On the other hand, the fact that blackness is something that remains—and something that can reappear—derives from the way in which African ancestry was considered a stain, even if it is a distant one. While the casta system was put in place to maintain the purity of the Spanish blood, Indian blood could eventually be cleared whereas African blood could not. In colonial logics, a Spaniard and an Indian beget a mestizo who, when procreating with a Spaniard would create a castizo. When the castizo, who at this point has one Indian grandparent to three Spanish grandparents, mixes with a Spaniard, their offspring is for all intents and purposes categorized as a Spaniard. The purity is restored. The Spanish–African and the Indigenous–African lines had no such resolution. For these mixtures, the generations are increasingly assigned fraught terms, that though they were rarely if ever used in common parlance, shed light on the racial logic underpinning the Spanish colonial society. The Afro-descendant categories included fanciful terms including *torna atrás* (return backwards), *tente en el aire* (hold yourself up in the air), and *no te entiendo* (I don't understand you).

African ancestry was considered a stain even more stubborn than the bloodstain that vexed the Lady Macbeth. It is why two seemingly white parents, if one were to base their assessment purely on phenotypic expression, could produce a child of dark complexion and negroid features, a *torna atrás*, a return backwards. The stark difference between the light-skinned parents and the dark-skinned child render visible the spiraling categorization that African ancestry caused. The *torna atrás* is a throwback, the third generation of the Spanish–

Black African genealogy. In the *casta* painting series this category of person is often depicted with a Spanish father and an *albina* mother. The Albina with her near white complexion was the offspring of a Spaniard and a *morisco*, the latter being reimagined as a quarter-black individual rather than its peninsular significance as a person of Moorish descent. In New Spain the *morisco* was a child of a *mulato* and a Spaniard, having one black African grandparent. This is all to say that the albino is the third crossing with a “pure” Spaniard, and “for all sensible purposes” is a return to the “original blood”—at least according to contemporary understandings of ancestry and mixture (cf. Jefferson 1815).¹⁷ Thus despite its often-favorable comparison to the binary racial system of the United States (Warren and Sue 2011), the fluidity of the Latin American system had a decided directionality away from blackness. The stain, then, is a very particularly Spanish rationalization, one that is seeing new life in contemporary Veracruz. However, because blackness is now valorized, the stain works as a source of essence rather than merely shame.

The blackness of the colonial *jarocho* is a stain in the sense that it is indelible. The general invisibility of the stain forces a reconciliation that either renders it in the present or projects it into the future. In that sense, the stain does not necessarily carry the negative connotation of the colonial past. Rather, it serves as an origin story, an invisible source to which a variety of qualities can be attributed. The steady focus on the black past makes blackness a heritage that can be collectively imagined and accessed; it does not deny a contemporary blackness. Instead, it conditions the possibility of blackness in the present and the future. Since

¹⁷ Thomas Jefferson famously created a mathematical equation based in “natural history” that argued that “the third crossing clears the blood.” He buttresses his math with an example from animal husbandry in which “a fourth cross of one race with another gives an issue equivalent for all sensible purpose to the original blood.” His alleged offspring with Sally Hemings would qualify for this blood clearing math. In other words, they were for all intents and purposes equal to white people, save for the fact that they were born of an enslaved womb. In other words, in the same way that the Spanish-Indian mixture returned to purity in the third generation, so too (theoretically) could the mixture of black and white blood in the United States.

the possessive quality of the *Nuestra Tercera Raíz* program has taken hold in the port city, it has effectively changed the narrative, making blackness something that has always already been there despite the recent history in which it has become popular in the public discourse. What is more, it has made blackness something that can be accessed through folk notions of race or commonly held assumptions of jarocho character.

The rediscovery and valorization of the ethnoracial jarocho allows the figure to serve as what Stuart Hall terms the “cultural resource” that allows a people to produce their own identity, for “identity is not in the past to be found, but in the future to be constructed” (S. Hall 1995). The processual nature of identity dictates that we not look for black people in Veracruz, which is a prematurely delimiting and ethnographically confounding question. Rather, examining blackness, as it slips between heredity, heritage, and back again, attends to the ever-unfolding process of reckoning with a genealogy, an expectation, and ultimately a possibility.

*Gurumbé, gurumbé
Gurumbé, gurumbé
Que hace nubla 'o
Y quiere llove*¹⁸

Chayo and I had just met, and he was already recounting a personal anecdote from when his wife was expecting their first child. Jarochos are notoriously open like that. Late into his wife’s pregnancy, his mother took him aside for a candid conversation. “No te preocupes,” she said, if the child came out dark. Do not worry, because “we have the blood in our family.” Chayo, with his lighter-shade-of-brown complexion was quintessentially *moreno*, that middle of the road color so commonly seen in Veracruz. Most of his family is similarly complected, but his mother remembered and reminded. Chayo mused that perhaps his great-grandfather or great-

¹⁸ Gurumbé gurumbé, gurumbé gurumbé. It is cloudy and it wants to rain.

great-grandfather was Cuban. He did not really know, nor did he question his mother's heeding. He would not worry. A darker child was a potentiality—they have the blood. And as Verónica says, it skips generations.

While the blood may skip a generation, the ready—if conflicted—reference to a possessive blackness is a direct result of thirty years of official public discourse valorizing and emphasizing the Afro-Caribbean nature of Veracruz. This generation-long telling of themselves about themselves has transformed blackness into a ready resource in the “never-ending story” (Sansone 2003) of Veracruzán's ethnic identity as both Afro-Caribbean and Mexican. What remains to be determined in this new generation heralded by the 2015 midterm census is whether this process of ethnicization will lead the *negritos mexicanos* to become Afro-Mexicans. In the chapters that follow, I explore how Veracruz officially became Afro-Caribbean; the ways in which it is proclaimed for an outside audience; and how it is perpetuated across the generations.

CHAPTER TWO: THE PRESENCE OF THE PAST

“History does not belong only to its narrators, professional or amateur. While some of us debate what history is or was, others take it in their own hands.”
—Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*

“No cultural identity is produced out of thin air. It is produced out of those historical experiences, those cultural traditions, those lost and marginal languages, those marginalized experiences, those peoples and histories which remain unwritten. Those are the specific roots of identity. On the other hand, identity itself is not the rediscovery of them, but what they as cultural resources allow a people to produce. Identity is not in the past to be found, but in the future to be constructed.”
—Stuart Hall, “Negotiating Caribbean Identities”

I moved my chair to better see the files on Ramon’s computer screen. Years ago, he had taken high resolution images of the *padrón*, or census, conducted in 1791, just twenty years prior to the war of Independence. Thus, these images represented one of the last snapshots of colonial Veracruz, one in which various statuses—freedom or enslavement, marriage or widowhood, youth or old age—come together to help historians like Ramón depict how Veracruz once was. Along with these images of the tightly-scripted, heavily-blotted yellow pages currently housed in the City Archives were a Word document with the same information made legible and an Excel spreadsheet with the different census takers’ data on its own dedicated sheet.

As we scrolled through the 166-page Word document, Ramón would read aloud the paragraphs of descriptions that caught his eye. Near the very beginning of the document, the boldface type of some entries made his skimming all the easier. While he did not disclose what rationale he had used to make these distinctions, all of the paragraphs corresponded to an entry that made mention of one of the *casta* terms that are now considered to be Afro-descendant populations: *negro*, *mulato*, *moreno*, *pardo*, *chino*.¹ The census, which was conducted by various

¹ Mulatos, chinos, zambos, and lobos are all *casta* terms for people of indigenous and African descent.

men responsible for their own sectors of the walled city, is a numbered list of descriptions that not only named the individual, but also his or her place of birth, occupation, marital status and age, offspring, and other dependents if they had them. For instance, the third entry of the document reads:

María Gabriela Pedroso, Free morena, widow native of this city of 50 years of age, has two daughters, one 30 years old and the other 19, the first is a widow with 6 children 4 female (ages 18, 16, 15, 14) and one male of 14 and the other of 9, a female Native servant from Xalapa, aged 19, a mestizo male servant native to this city, skilled mason, married with a free *parda*, born of this city aged 34, who has a 2 year old son.

Ramón read aloud this entry, emphasizing the different categories of Afro-descendants as he went. His fingers twitched as if keeping track of the people captured in this entry alone. Eleven in total between the main entrant, her children and grandchildren, and her servant's wife and child.

After spending some time on these census documents, Ramón switched over to watercolors painted by the Swiss artist Johann Salomon Hegi between 1849 and 1860. These images depicted everyday life in the port city in the century between Independence and Revolution. We clicked through the scanned images as he eagerly pointed out the faces that represented the “*raza negra*”, or black race, that according to Ramón has since mixed out. As with the census, the ambit of figures worthy of note far exceeded the strict categorization of *negro*, or black, that he utilized for contemporary people. His cursor would hover over quite dark people and lighter complexioned people with negroid features alike. In a few of the images, you see dark-skinned men moving goods or participating in the militia—two occupations that were common among Afro-descendants (Carroll 1991). In others, women with big lips or flat noses are captured in their daily lives, conversing in a social gathering, making tortillas, or having a cigarette.

One tableau reads like a cross-section of Veracruz. It is set in a public space that already shows signs of disrepair, and the artist has painted several women into the frame. A dark-skinned woman with negroid features stands in a doorway looking to her right. A brown-skinned woman on the sidewalk is looking in the same direction while holding the hand of a little child whose figure is spectral. The woman with her *rebozo*, or shawl, and fan appears to be a caretaker of the young girl whose figure Hegi did not complete. From the spectral outline the viewer can tell she is wearing a hat and looking off to her left into the street. Behind the woman and her charge are three Spanish women identifiable by their dress and *mantilla*, the traditional Spanish lace veil. In another image labeled “Lechero”, Hegi depicts not the coffee and hot milk beverage Veracruz is now famous for, but rather a milkman dispensing his good to a group of children of different shades of brown. Like many of these everyday life images, the figures all manifest the various phenotypic expressions found among the people of mixed ancestry.

Ramón concluded his popular history lesson with two video clips that represented Veracruz decades after the Mexican Revolution. The moving pictures captured as part of a developing tourism industry and Mexico’s Golden Age of Cinema depicted two different facets of Veracruz—one romantically Spanish and another exotically Caribbean.² Ramón was just as keen on my learning from these videos as he was for me to understand the census data and the paintings. In the movie clip, he pointed to darker bodies as still being present. In the tourism video, there were none to be seen.

This orderly journey through different media and different centuries underscored his earlier point that you no longer find Black people in Veracruz even though there used to be many. The “mixing out” is already evident in colonial Veracruz as census entries recorded the

² A detailed analysis of these videos is in chapter 3.

intercaste relationships and their progeny. Newly independent Veracruz still had more visibly Afro-descendant inhabitants, as captured by a foreigner's eye, but within a century's time, such persons could alternately be included or excised from how Veracruz was depicted. There was no need for Ramón to reference the images of today—we had made and remade our acquaintance at numerous cultural and historical events sponsored by the state that kept telling the story of Veracruz, creating their own image of a port city that is both heroically Mexican and self-evidently Caribbean. Instead, Ramón was all too eager to reimagine the past through the vestiges large and small, academic and popular that remained in the city he called home.

The words *rescate* and its verb form *rescatar* ring out across the old city for those who care to listen. And in listening, I heard a variety of connotations behind the word. Sometimes *rescate* referred to a recovery, other times a revitalization, others still a recuperation. All these words are shades of a similar phenomenon—a restoration of the past for an intended future. *Rescate*, in essence, encompasses the collapsing of the past and the future. Or rather, it is the bridging of the two, for collapse implies the active passivity of being “let to disrepair” seen in the old buildings throughout the city. It dwells in that place of tension between preservation and restoration, between the impulse to freeze a moment in time as it is and the desire to go back in time to the way things were. *Rescate* in the port of Veracruz—the oldest European town in mainland America—waffles between these motivations as it uses the past as a source of the potential. Nowhere is this clearer than in the ways blackness and local culture have been reunited and restored.

To understand the significance of blackness today in Veracruz you must understand how an afrojarrocho past is being taken up and internalized by locals actively identifying with the now

regional marker *jarocho*. The term's shift from being constitutive to being minimized and ultimately to being unevenly valorized plots the evolving significance of how the African ancestry and influence in Veracruz has existed. Blackness in jarocho-ness is a restoration precisely because the term which was once a *casta* term for people of Afro-Indigenous descent underwent a deracination in the mid-20th century only to be re-ethnicized in the late 20th and early 21st century. This "blackening" of what is now a regional term results from a popularization of Afro-Mexican history brought about by the Nuestra Tercera Raíz (Our Third Root) program started in the late 1980s. Since then, blackness has been recovered by jarochos. But this *rescate* is not a return to a racialized identification. Rather, blackness, as it is situated in the past and at the root of the jarocho, works to make an individual more jarocho rather than more Black. To echo Stuart Hall, the jarochos' identity is not found in this acknowledged and valorized afrojarocho past, but it nevertheless serves as a resource for the ongoing and future construction of the jarochos as a people.

This chapter explores how people use history to ground and corroborate the importance of *lo negro*, or blackness, in contemporary Veracruz, Mexico. In other words, it explores both how locals have re-membered Veracruz's past with Africans and their descendants and how they have internalized and interpreted this remembrance. This process has many sources—institutions, archives, song lyrics, nostalgia, and dance moves. To use Diana Taylor's (2003) distinction, the re-membered African past in Veracruz is undergirded by both the archive with its preferential treatment of the written word, and the repertoire, the embodied memories that have been passed down, rescued, and invented in the intervening years between the first recorded presence of Africans and the acknowledgement of that presence, and then again in the time between the acknowledgement and the internalization. Archives and repertoires that have a long

presence in the port city help create the localized treatment of jarocho's blackness. While Afro-Mexican Studies has had a boom in the last thirty years, it is the ongoing *rescate* of cultural practices and their recruitment of third root rhetoric that has allowed ideas of localized blackness to flourish in the city and among jarochos. For acknowledgement alone does not explain the social factness of blackness one observes today in Veracruz—a fact that cannot be made fiction despite the marginal salience of Black as a political identity.

Therefore, this chapter explains how ideas about an afrojarrocho past circulate and what conditions made their adoption and circulation possible. It gives an account of an afrojarrocho history in Veracruz through the ways in which everyday people narrate not only slavery but also history overall. These ideas are passed on like hearsay and like fact; like revelations and like anecdotes. The circulation of ideas about this black history has its own history, interfacing with broader phenomena like the Post-Revolutionary moment and the consolidation of the jarocho stereotype at the height of nation-building and the development of the aforementioned “Nuestra Tercera Raíz” that began in 1989 during the multiculturalist turn. This chapter focuses on this recent history to analyze how the distant past has been taken up by everyday people and used as an explanation for the present and a resource for the unknown future. It engages with the ways that a national program originating out of the National Council for the Arts (CONACULTA) has been internalized and rationalized by the locals of Veracruz.³ The “our,” after all, that people reference is not a national one; it is quite local. It is therefore a story of the various ways in which music and public history support the narrative that Veracruz and its jarochos have both a

³ CONACULTA was founded in 1988 and became the Ministry of Culture in 2015.

herencia and a pringa of *lo negro*.⁴ In this chapter, I reference the same sources of information and entry points used by my interlocutors to reconstruct an incomplete yet rich historical account of people of African descent in Veracruz.

Institutional Memory and Jarocho Publics

“La gran mayoría de la gente no tiene idea sobre la esclavitud,” Javier began before his coworker Julia interjected, “en la ciudad no hubo.” Too distracted by Julia’s incorrect assertion that there was no slavery in the city, I took for granted Javier’s matter of fact statement that the “vast majority of people in Veracruz have no idea about slavery.” In fact, it was easy to get distracted as Javier went around the open office organizing VHS tapes and manila folders. He was in the process of packing up his office located in one site under the direction of the Instituto Veracruzano de la Cultura (IVEC), or the Veracruz Institute of Culture, before moving to another site within the organization. The move would have him traverse the city and in a small way travel through time. Which is to say, he was moving from a 17th-century building with an early 21st century renovation to an 18th-century building renovated near the end of the 20th century.

Javier’s relocation would give him more space as he continued to assemble an archive of IVEC events and programming—particularly the International Afro-Caribbean Festival for which he had worked as an organizer on the academic side for years—while taking on a new role within the organization. In his new role, he would continue to work toward IVEC’s mission to “preserve, promote, and disseminate culture, through the broad and plural participation of the citizenry in order to fortify the values and cultural heritage of Veracruzanos.” Founded in the late

⁴ This argument is developed in chapter one. In it, I trace the ways in which blackness as *herencia* is understood both an inheritance and as heredity, and as a *pringa*, which is to say both as a drop (in reference to Vasconcelos’s *La raza cósmica*) and as a stain in reference to logics based in *limpieza de sangre*.

1980s, the whole of IVEC functions as the port city's *casa de la cultura*, those cultural centers whose general objective is to recompose "the social fabric through programs that stimulate creative and artistic sensitivity, promote the enjoyment of the arts and peaceful coexistence, and provoke the valuation and recreation of intangible cultural heritage."⁵ Rather than one cultural center dedicated to workshops or art exhibitions, the port city has a network of sites dedicated to promoting its mission. Although not the state's capital, Veracruz is home to seven of IVEC's thirteen sites statewide, with five situated in the state capital of Xalapa and one in Orizaba. Of the seven sites in the city of Veracruz, five are under the arts and heritage division while one is under artistic education and research. The final site is an 18th-century ex-convent that was restored in 1987 and has served as the headquarters of IVEC since the Institute was established by law.⁶ However IVEC also functions as an actor rather than a place given its presence and importance in the cultural landscape of Veracruz. As an acting entity, IVEC pursues its mission through various festivals like the aforementioned Afrocaribeño Festival, through workshops teaching fine and plastic arts, art exhibitions, and academic forums, just to name a few of their public programming efforts.

Because their mission predominantly focuses on themes and topics they consider to be local culture, history functions to explain or contextualize local culture and traditions. In other words, the academic forums and programming that focus on historical themes are often purposeful in nature and directed toward better understanding cultural practices. What is more,

⁵ <http://litorale.com.mx/ivec/subdirecciones48.php?id=48>

⁶ Although IVEC's headquarters is in Veracruz, the governor is the president of the Board of the Directors and several ministers serve on the Board. This split nexus of power creates an uneasy feeling of autonomy and dependency at the IVEC. For instance, elections always create a reorganization at IVEC since the Director is appointed by the state governor. Following the most recent election, many staff were uncertain about the future of IVEC following the election of Miguel Angel Yunes of the National Action Party (PAN), which was the first time in 86 years that the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) would not hold the governorship in Veracruz.

the division of this cultural labor across IVEC's cities and sites solidifies the locus of blackness in the port as opposed to Orizaba or Xalapa. Additionally, local actors such as Javier, Julia, and their colleagues have faithfully promoted the idea of the African influence in Veracruz is present and significant.

It is also important to realize that the founding of IVEC predates the creation of the *Nuestra Tercera Raíz* program by only two years. As contemporaries, an attention to Afro-Mexico has been a part of IVEC's programming from nearly the start. According to French sociologist Christian Rinaudo, to understand the local iteration of the Third Root Movement, one must put it in context: the late 1980s and 1990s were a time when UNESCO was actively supporting research focused on the cultural links between Latin America and Africa. He credits that support with the proliferation and circulation of research that focused on the cultural influences and the "Black presence" in Latin America and in turn the invisibility of such populations (Rinaudo 2012). Mexico's "Nuestra Tercera Raíz" program resulted from this groundswell of interest. It was founded in 1989 by anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla in the Department of Popular Cultures of Conaculta with the academic Luz María Martínez Montiel as the program's coordinator. The goal of the program was to study and appreciate the African presence in Mexico and to recognize it as the third cultural root of the country's *mestizaje*.⁷ The research, expositions, symposiums, and workshops that stemmed from the program helped create the discourse that we still see today both nationally and internationally. Rinaudo, however, also makes the moment local by pointing out the ways in which the port city was already catching the

⁷ Since then there has been pushback among scholars regarding the ordinal ranking, stating that in many cases—like that of Veracruz—it functions more like the first root than the third.

wave of black consciousness initiated by organizations like UNESCO and its Slave Route program.

The national “Our Third Root” program found resonance with a contemporaneous, local academic forum, “Veracruz también es Caribe”,⁸ thus creating what he terms the “cultural politics” that led to the “entry of Veracruz in the Caribbean and the promotion of the third root” (67-71). However, unlike the focus on slavery, the local discourse in 1989 and 1990 was coalescing around Veracruz’s place in the Caribbean, highlight cultural similarities developed through the close maritime ties within the cultural region rather than through the history of enslavement. Decades later, it remains evident that this local interest was not supplanted by the national turn toward slavery. Indeed, when Martínez Montiel oversaw renovating the Museo de la Ciudad,⁹ she included Mexico’s first museum gallery dedicated to slavery. In the years that have passed, that gallery and most mentions of slavery have been revised. Instead, you have a narrative that is driven by the work of academic Antonio García de León and his emphasis on the Afro-Andalusian Caribbean and its cultural commonalities. Therefore, the primary narrative in the port focuses on the cultural ties *jarocho*s have with other Caribbean regional subpopulations.

In other words, Afro-descended peoples and their history during the time of enslavement have not been overlooked—just the enslavement itself. In fact, this attitude reflects historian Herman Bennett’s stance on Afro-Mexican historiography. He has argued that while the institution of slavery was “the foundational ontology that shaped the emergent social and cultural forms manifest among Africans and their descendants,” scholarship grounded in the slave experience does not adequately apply to “the population of free people that emerged a generation

⁸ Veracruz is also Caribbean

⁹ City Museum

after their African parents landed in new Spain” (Bennett 2009, 6). Jarochos were largely comprised of this population. Contemporarily, the cultural traits forged during the enslavement period have been evacuated from slavery itself and valorized as part of the *jarochos* character. Thus, while the “vast majority” of people in Veracruz know nothing about slavery; many nevertheless know at least the basics about *their* African presence by way of the Caribbean.

So, the question becomes, if the “vast majority” of people were ignorant about slavery, was that not under people like Javier and Julia’s purview to address? In fact, I had seen them both host and give remarks in public forums that worked to address not only ignorance about the period of enslavement, but Afro-Mexican history in Veracruz post-Independence. Their expertise was in fact why I even noted Julia’s denial of urban slavery, with field notes commentary included, “she should know better.” I had based this assessment of what she ought to have known on my other field experiences throughout the historic center where half-truths and misattributions were said with various degrees of certitude. However, this assessment of the “ought to” also reveals how Javier was incorrect, if not in degree, then by sentiment. Julia’s comments exist in a context in which other people also have their own assertions to offer about slavery in Veracruz, Mexico. While it is very possible that the vast majority of the over half a million people making up Veracruz’s population have no idea about slavery, there are actually several ideas about slavery in circulation in the port city, the very same port of entry for the hundreds of thousands of enslaved Africans who were brought to the country during the colonial period. While IVEC is a dominating presence in the port city, they are not the only purveyor of information nor the only authority consulted.

The discourse that started nearly three decades ago has not necessarily created Black subjects—though it is possible that at least some of the nearly 5% of residents who identified as

Afro-Mexican in the historic 2015 midterm census were influenced by the knowledge that their history, culture, and tradition was partly of African influence. Instead, these discourses hail something that is already there in the jarocho way of life, thereby constituting distinct yet overlapping publics, each of which are “jarocho” in their own way. Put another way, the third root rhetoric of son jarocho, is not the same as that of the danzón nor that of son veracruzano, but each of the publics now have an internalized and localized entry point and possessive view of the third root.

With over half a million inhabitants, these “jarocho publics” allow one to get her bearing and find an anchor of sorts in Veracruz. For many, that anchor is the music itself. These various jarocho publics are at once concrete audiences, bound by an event or physical space, and spaces of discourse that are circularly organized by the discourse itself (Warner 2005, 66). In other words, though they are locatable through the former definition of a public, they are constituted by the latter, by the self-reflective discourse. This public-making discourse simultaneously centers on the musical genres themselves and the public who recognize themselves within the music. The discourse’s circulating texts are at once academic and popular, its authors at once poets and aficionados, chroniclers and scholars, musicians and maestros, dancers and passersby.

In Veracruz, where the festival schedule is perennial, the fandangos¹⁰ monthly, and the free live music nearly daily, there is a lot to draw one’s attention. It is in the air, carried on the breeze traveling through old *callejones* created by buildings made of coral or across the open water that made the city itself. It is also on the airwaves emitting from the XEU radio tower, on vinyl signs draped in view of major thoroughfares, on the biweekly calendar of events posted by the tourism office. It is on the tips of both fingers and tongues as those in the know share an

¹⁰ Convivial gatherings during which people collectively engage in the music and dance of the son jarocho tradition.

irregularity in a schedule that is otherwise best described as a standing engagement. Despite all of this, there are those who live, work, and love in the port city who consider themselves jarochos but do not actively participate in what I have termed the “jarocho publics.” Nevertheless, passive participation is hard to avoid, and belonging to a public, as Michael Warner argues, can be as simple as merely paying attention and need not be a permanent state of being (Warner, 71). There are so many opportunities to pay attention however fleeting for Veracruz is a place that tells itself and others about itself, constantly.

These robust discourses in which blackness oscillates between being a prerequisite and a banal statement of fact, are the vectors through which knowledge of blackness spreads across the historic port city. As Stuart Hall argues, identities are constructed within discourse and are therefore productions of “specific historical and institutional sites with specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies” (2000, 17). In Veracruz, the specific discourses on blackness constitute the jarocho communities more so than communities of people identifying as Black or Afro-Mexican. Hettie Malcomson has done extensive work in one such community—that of the danzoneros, a community in which she argues blackness functions as a “non-identity, something rarely linked to slavery or emancipatory politics, but to vague racialized, bodily characteristics, moralities and cultural phenomenon” (Malcomson 2016, 45). While Malcomson uses the term “non-identity” to distinguish the phenomenon from political identification *as* Afro-Mexican, it is not a non-identity at all. Instead, it is part and parcel of one’s identity as jarocho and participation in a jarocho public. However, it is not unique to just the danzoneros.¹¹ The jaraneros of son jarocho and the soneros of son veracruzano have similar

¹¹ In this chapter, I do not explore the danzonero scene because the rhetorics of blackness do not adhere to the music, but rather the dance. Further discussion of the danzón community is taken up in chapter four.

understandings of blackness that are articulated in the discourse of the third root as it relates to their genre of music. In what follows, I will trace the way in which these jarocho publics both narrate and make narratable a jarocho past populated by people of African descent.

From Centuries Past

“Y esto que ves aquí, que vienen y se juntan a bailar, viene desde siglos pasados,”¹² Alfredo said as we sat on a bench in the Plazuela. We were meeting in that time of day when the shadows of the old and new buildings stretch into the small plaza and make it a comfortable place to pass the time or rest a spell. It would be hours before the Plazuela filled with the alluded to dancing bodies, to the people who come together and make the Plazuela more than just the negative space between structures spanning the centuries. When he referenced “here,” then, he was not being literal; after all, the Plazuela as a nightspot began within the last twenty years. Its founders are still able to recount how what started as a friend group’s bohemian night transformed into a four-nights-a-week open air dance space. Instead, Alfredo was speaking metaphorically, connecting the contemporary practice of public dancing to a colonial past. In the story he wove, enslaved people both African and indigenous, came together after a day’s work to sing and dance. This, he said, is what is left to poor people—this tradition of convivial singing and dancing. As he explains it, such traditions are a way to get rid of one’s anguish and ameliorate one’s poverty. It was a way to, as he put it, “face life.” And it is places like the Plazuela where people from Veracruz—now collectively known as jarochos—face life together. Such places, he notes, are not frequented by rich people who he caricatures as sitting at home counting their money. Indeed, as soon as he conjures them, he dismisses them. His interest is

¹² “And this what you see here, they come and get together to dance, it comes from centuries past.”

reserved for those who do come to this place and how they are following the same paths laid centuries prior. And while I knew how our paths had cross, at the time it was unclear to me how this encounter which started off as a favor became a philosophical reflection on history and its presence in the port city of Veracruz, Mexico.

Like many, Alfredo's path toward "facing life" has led him to the public dancing scene of Veracruz. He is a constant presence both in the zócalo, or main plaza, and in the smaller, nearby Plazuela. His sartorial choices adhere to the traditional white associated with Veracruz, though it is often a white polo shirt that is tucked into his front pleated khakis instead of a linen guayabera. He often finishes his look with a hat, though he is a generation removed from the retired and semi-retired "café flies"—the cohort of men who keep the tradition of hat wearing alive. Alfredo is not from Veracruz, which is to say he was not born into being a jarocho, but one would not guess that based on his almost guaranteed attendance at any event with a live band and dancing in the public spaces of the historic city. In this way, he was recognizable before I met him, an unacquainted acquaintance as is so often the case in the public dancing scene.

For many nights, our paths had run parallel but never crossed until one evening when the locally famous sonero band Los Pregoneros del Recuerdo were playing a song I had never heard, and Alfredo noticed my attempts to capture it for my archive. Weeks later, I would recognize the song when the University of Veracruz's Orquesta Tradicional Moscovita performed it with the recently deceased sonero nicknamed El Güero, which is a term for white people, unironically sang it for an enraptured crowd. Sometime later the Pregoneros again pulled out the sheet music for this plaintive song. My files in fact are filled with incomplete recordings of the song, getting more complete as time went on, creating an inadvertent record of my own growing familiarity with the song. By the end of my time in Veracruz, I could recognize the piece by its opening

measure, and could practically sing along word for word. It was not the most commonly performed ballad in the sonero groups' repertoires, but it is common enough to be considered a standard. Though my files are filled with these amputated traces of lived experience, I do have a complete version of the song as sung by Alfredo into the quiet of the Plazuela.

His eyes had slipped closed as he sang the lyrics written in the 1950s by the Veracruzano Félix Barragán. Though not a strong singer, Alfredo sang unabashedly in the square about the protagonist's journey from being enchained in a caravan somewhere in Africa to being brought to a faraway land "where our color is an affront to other people." Voicing this lamenting slave, Alfredo asks the white man's god to one day take him back to the distant jungle where he was born so that he could die happy among "dark-skinned people" who he now refers to as his "sister race."¹³

As Alfredo strained to hold the last note to "El Esclavo," or "The Slave," he opened his eyes to gauge my reaction. No, his voice was not as strong as El Güero's, or the singer who not only made the song famous but also gave the aforementioned orchestra his name, Pedro "Moscovita" Dominguez Castillo, but the emotion in Alfredo's rendition was a testament to the personal childhood memories he had of his father playing the song at home. The song, as I found out, was also his way into understanding and telling the story of slavery in Mexico and to identifying its carryovers today. Alfredo used the lyrics of "El Esclavo" to make sense of the conviviality among indigenous and African peoples both of whom he stresses were enslaved. In

¹³ Voy cantando por la vida las tristezas de mi alma dolorida/Al pensar que mi amargura es tan solo la negrura de mi piel/Soy el esclavo que un día partiera en la caravana/De un hombre blanco que a muchos negros encadenó/Y nos llevaron lejos muy lejos a tierra extraña/ Donde es afrenta para otras gentes (sic) nuestro color/Le pido al dios de los hombres blancos que un día me lleve/Hasta la jungla, jungla lejana donde nací/Y allá entre gente de piel oscura, mi raza hermana/Pueda tranquilo, este pobre negro, morir feliz.

their mutual suffering, they became brothers and created their music. It is that music and that tradition they left behind as their legacy. “What you see here...comes from centuries past.”

It comes from centuries past and it comes from mere decades ago. It comes from last week and it will come in the next. It comes from within the blood of the jarocho and it comes from the cooperation of the community. It comes despite the state’s absence just as it comes scheduled on the events calendars posted by the municipal tourism office. It even comes when the sky turns a burnt sienna, a sure sign that rain is imminent. It comes when tourists descend like locusts and when even the ambulatory vendors do not bother to show up for want of clients. It comes from all these things and more. But Alfredo put it most succinctly. This, what you see here comes from centuries past. In this chronotope known as Veracruz, the past and future are dance partners and the present keeps time. With all respect to L.P. Hartley, despite its bouts of nostalgia, in Veracruz the past does not seem like a foreign country; they do not do things differently there.¹⁴

When Alfredo stated that what you see here comes from centuries past, he verbalized the way in which multiple times are gathered in the historic city. It is made audible by the strains of old music and new that make their way to one’s ear at any given moment. It is made visible by the multi-generational use of public space. It is made tangible by the close company kept by buildings representing a wide range of centuries in various stages of disrepair. The different tempos that dictate the everyday lives of jarocho create, among other things, an aural, corporeal, and theoretical connection to a jarocho type, rendering it ever timely and timeless. Time signatures abound in the public spaces of the old port city, and not just with the iconic genres of rhythms proper to the city made by the sea. Linearity is eschewed for the cyclicity felt in the

¹⁴ *The Go-Between* (1953).

ostinato—an underlying, repetitive motif—that characterizes son jarocho and son veracruzano. It forms a throbbing baseline above which the improvisation and the call and response of everyday life are laid. In a certain way, it invites the dreaded ethnographic present, for “this thing you see here” is ever contemporary even as it came, comes, and will continue to come from centuries past. It was not mere hyperbole when Alfredo connected the present customs of gathering together with an unspecified anterior time. His words were not flippant, but rather careless, as if there was nothing noteworthy about the claim he had made. In the act of telling, he rushed to his conclusion as if on one breath. Situated in the early 21st century, he began to explain a mid-20th century ballad and found himself centuries back in the colonial period. He placed the “what you see here” at the root, at the founding of Veracruz. The habit, the tradition, and in some ways the *need*, to gather together and dance becomes co-constitutive of Veracruz itself.

When I made the plan to meet Alfredo in the Plazuela, I had thought I was merely adding another peculiarity to my growing collection of random, fleeting, ephemeral mentions of an afrojarrocho past. These moments, to echo Walter Benjamin, would flit by, too quickly for me to arrest in an audio file to play back at my leisure. At first, they seemed to flash into conversation, seemingly unprovoked and unexamined. As time went on, within jarocho publics, these mentions served as a spark quickly forgotten as the conversation moved on to what they really wanted to talk about. These were easier to capture but no less confounding. And even though our meeting in the Plazuela was arranged in advance, the real significance of this very intentionally provoked conversation nearly escaped me. For it was only after listening to the tapes that I understood how the singing of that song led to a philosophical reflection on the nature of facing life in the port city of Veracruz.

In one of his theses on the philosophy of history, Benjamin argues, “The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again” (1969, 255). Benjamin furthers his case in the following thesis by connecting the concerns of the present with the retention of the past. Those things that have no salience in the presence, are threatened to be “lost in the void the very moment [the historian] opens his mouth.” For these reasons Benjamin argues that the work of the historian is dangerous—vulnerable to both misalignment and cooption. For not only does the concerns of the present dictate what of the past can be recognizable, the mere articulation of the past historically does not mean fidelity to that past. The former danger, he identifies as being lost in the void; the latter in becoming “a tool of the ruling class.” Thus is the dangerous work of the historical materialist.

But what of the work of the singer? Flitting and flashing images may elude seizure, but what of the echoing reverberations of the song? On the one hand, the danger I felt, the unsettling feeling of a missed opportunity, of a significance recognized almost too late, was ultimately misplaced. On the other hand, this moment of *rescate* in which *lo negro* is a present concern both amplified my ear and Alfredo’s narration. Regardless, the song still flit and flashed like lightning, but its sonic reverberations rolled like thunder.

The shift from a visual register to an aural one does not remove the importance of the present in the moment of retrospection. Nor is the focus on the aural intended to replace the visual. In the end, it matters that Alfredo drew my attention to what I *see* in the Plazuela. Given the importance of music to the cross-generational tableau he draws, it is as valid for him to have said, that which you hear here, comes from centuries past. Alfredo’s ability to link the song not only to his childhood memories with his father but also to the very formation of the jarocho people and their culture developed within the context of public discourse about the African

influence in Mexico, a discourse sparked by the Nuestra Tercera Raíz program. Since then, the attention to the African influence and presence in Mexico in general and Veracruz in particular has opened the space for certain kinds of conversation and certain kinds of connections. It did not, however, conjure the evidentiary that has become most salient to everyday people in the port city: music.

The most curious thing about Alfredo's narration was that he was triggered by a ballad rather than by the folkloric music known as son jarocho. Musically speaking, references to the long Afro-descendant presence in Veracruz from the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries are most common in son jarocho. The mid-20th century is almost exclusively focused on the music brought by immigrant groups—Cubans in particular—that revitalized the black presence in Veracruz. It is this period that interlocutors identify as the era when the Afro-Cuban genres of son music and the danzón “stuck” in Veracruz. Beyond the musical context, the term *cubano* contemporarily functions as an ethnoracial term rather than a nationalist one in much the same way that *jarocho* used to—it is a generic way refer to people who look unavoidably black through biologized signifiers of hair, skin color, facial features, and general body composition. *Cubano*, in that sense, has taken the place of the term *jarocho*, which in the colonial and postcolonial centuries primarily referred to Afro-Indigenous peoples. This older history, from centuries past, has more popularity among a different jarocho public to which Alfredo did not belong; it is primarily, though still unevenly, known among the jaraneros of the son jarocho community.

The Presence of the Archive in Son Jarocho

I had come to the open-air concert in the *zócalo* with my fellow son jarocho workshop members. The information about the concert had been shared on our messaging app group, and

several of us had decided to go. It was part of the International Festival of the Desert of Lions, according to the vinyl sign hanging on the stage's backdrop. None of us knew what this new festival in a calendar of festivals was actually about. We had come simply due to word of mouth. The black chairs normally used for the *danzón* had been placed in rows facing the permanent, raised space of the main plaza. Looking around, there were several familiar faces, recognizable from the many *fandangos* we had all attended in various locations throughout the city. Even still, one of my friends lamented the lack of people in attendance. *Mono Blanco* is a world-renowned group and one of the main protagonists of the genre's revitalization in the late 1970s. This was a free concert of a group that has sold out larger venues around the world, and yet a significant portion of those in attendance were the same people who can hear the various members of *Mono Blanco* play for free at any given *fandango* or at one of the workshops led by members of the group.

Between *sones*¹⁵ Gilberto “El Mono” Gutierrez took to the microphone to explain the piece that was just finished or was about to come. As is often the case with *son jarocho*, this was not merely a performance; it was also a lesson. An audience who is merely entertained was not sufficient; it must also be informed. In the transition from the *son de monton* “La Guacamaya” to the next piece, Gilberto told his audience—many of whom were *jaraneros* themselves, that the next *son* was “El Chuchumbé—a *son* that was an original of the group *Mono Blanco*, but now very much so in the traditional repertoire.” He goes on to recount that it was inspired by the story, or rather the history in the national archives of a prohibited song and dance called el

¹⁵ Pieces of music in the *son jarocho* tradition are known as *sones* rather than songs. There are two types: *sones de montón*, which are danced by women, and *sones de pareja*, which are paired dances. There are some exceptions to these categories such as the *son* “Colas” which is traditionally danced with four women and one man, or “Los Negritos” which can be danced with multiple couples on the *tarima*.

chuchumbé. As Cuban musicologist Alejo Carpentier has traced, the dance known as el chuchumbé arrived in 18th-century New Spain when a European ship from Havana dropped off some immigrants of “irregular color” to Veracruz (Carpentier and West-Durán 2000, 191). From there, it quickly spread throughout New Spain before coming to the attention of Inquisitors who condemned the lascivious movements of swaying bodies, the “barriga con barriga”, or belly to belly closeness, and lockstep movement. While El Mono does not narrate a musicological story of the son, he does tell the audience that it is not known how the dance’s music originally sounded before transitioning into the melody that is now known and taught the world over as “El Chuchumbé.”

“El Chuchumbé” is a popular son in the contemporary fandango scene. As with many *sones de pareja*, the couple on the tarima and their vigorous dancing matches the almost frenetic playing of the musicians around them. The melodic line of the guitarra de son traverses the anticipatory silence of the jaranas at the end of the chorus into the new cycle of the C-chord. The chord progression is relatively new, written by the very same Gilberto Gutierrez of the group Mono Blanco in the 1990s (Hernandez 2013). Many lyrics, as aforementioned, are a few centuries older, having survived the sands of time due to the archival record left by the Inquisition. It is the paradox Elena Deanda Camacho highlights when she argues that in documenting the object of their disdain with such meticulous care, the censor ultimately protects the object. Because the Inquisitors condemned and systemically persecuted popular sones like “El Chuchumbé”, the Inquisition “allowed generations to come to know that which should not have been known” (Deanda Camacho 2007, 53). However, it is not just the work of the censor or the archiver, it is also the work of Gutierrez and his desire to recuperate an artifact and restore its importance to the son jarocho tradition. Without his actions, “El Chuchumbé” would not have

reached its current vivacity. “El Chuchumbé” literally comes from centuries past while only really being created within living—and playing—memory. In many ways, “El Chuchumbé” is an ideal representation of the trajectory of both son jarocho and blackness in general—its transcultural past, its revitalized present, and, perhaps, its canonized future.

Within academic circles, “El Chuchumbé” serves as a case study for how to read the archive for marginalized voices. By reading its lascivious lyrics in the inquisitorial record as a critique of the clergy, historians and musicians have called it a protest song. For instance, due to the obsession of the Inquisitors and the interest of El Mono, the most famous verse is a direct vestige of the past, a bit of what Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995) called historicity 1: that which happened. It goes, “En la esquina está parado/un fraile de la Merced/Con los hábitos alzados/enseñando el chuchumbé” (A friar from the Merced is “standing” there on the corner with his religious garb raised showing the chuchumbé).¹⁶ However, the extensive records from the Inquisition— thirty-nine couplets recorded across five complaints issued between 1766 and 1772 (Deanda Camacho 2007)—not only preserved the lyrics and the dancing, but also the public that consumed this dance, a public filled with mulattos and the aforementioned people of irregular color. While some contemporary scholars read in these archival records a story of resistance and protest by Afro-descendant people “of irregular color,” (Hernandez 2013; Deanda 2010), others look to what the records show us about the gestures considered to be obscene (Baudot and Águeda Méndez 1997). The scandal of dancing “barriga con barriga”, or belly to belly, has in fact dictated contemporary dance practices associated with “El Chuchumbé” just as the lyrics have.

¹⁶ As Alexandro Hernandez writes, “El chuchumbé is colloquially referred to as “the area four to five inches below the belly button of a male.” “The Hidden Histories of Resistance in Mexico’s Son Jarocho” in *Sounds of Resistance: The Role of Music in Multicultural Activism*.

Other *sones* condemned by the Inquisition follow similar trajectories. The popular *son* “El Toro Zacamandú” is a *son de pareja*, or a paired dance, in which the dancers fast-paced stomping accompanies their pantomiming of a bull and matador. The male dancer with his fingers crooked to represent horns and his foot scraping back reminiscent of a charging bull dances toward the female dancer as she repeatedly teases him with a handkerchief before finally catching the cloth around his neck. Although one of the most common and frequently played *sones* (Oseguera Rueda and García Ranz 2011), the “torea,” or teasing, performed by the woman is considered offensive in some regions of Veracruz (Delgado Calderón 2004). “El Toro” in fact has a long history of offense. As the scholar and jaranero Álvaro Alcántara López (2015) recounts, the dance called Zacamandú first came to the attention to the Inquisition in 1779 when a black Cuban introduced it to Veracruz. Years later in 1803, the Inquisition notes a dance that accompanies a *son* varyingly called “El Torito” “Toro Viejo” or “Toro Nuevo.” The recorded choreography is remarkably similar to the contemporary “Toro Zacamandú,” with the man making horns and charging the woman, who plays the role of the bullfighter, teasing and irritating him. This pantomime, according to the 19th-century Inquisition informants was impolite and vulgar in that it appeared similar to “the ludic dynamics that precede the sexual act” (García de León and Rumazo 2006, 54). However, as Alcántara notes, no one knows how Zacamandú—the dance first registered in the Inquisition records—was danced or accompanied by music. As he highlights, “What we can see is that “curiously,” the description made two hundred years ago of the Torito coincides with the way in which the *son* “Toro Zacamandú” is danced today in the jarocho fandangos” (Alcántara López 2015, 61). The way in which these two dances became one is unknown. Regardless, El Toro Zacamandú is one of the most popular

sones played and danced. It is also one of the first songs jaraneros reference when acknowledging the third root in their musical tradition.

In the performance in the zócalo, El Mono's—and by extension, Mono Blanco's—politics were certainly on display with the *son* with which they decided to follow “El Chuchumbé.” In his interlude, El Mono discussed how previously the government denied “la presencia de la cultura africana en nuestra cultura”—the presence of the African culture in our culture.¹⁷ It is fortunate, he continues, that thirty years ago began the Third Root program before explaining it for the audience members who may not be familiar with it. Speaking personally of Mono Blanco's experience, Gutierrez recounts how they have interacted with Caribbean and African musicians and with them have found “una amalgama natural a través de la rítmica, a través de ese ritmo africano que también es nuestro. Porque nuestro ritmos también son afro.”¹⁸ This natural cultural fusion through the African rhythms—rhythms that are also theirs—inspired them to play the next *son*, “El Camotal”¹⁹ without the stringed instruments associated with *son jarocho*. Using purely percussive instruments, the leading group in *son jarocho*'s *rescate* was trying to revive something again—something they proclaimed to be both theirs and “afro” while standing in the main plaza of Veracruz. The percussive dancing on the tarima blended with the *pandero jarocho* (an octagonal tambourine), the *quijada* (donkey jawbone), and a small *güiro* whose rasp of the stick against its ridges was all but drowned out by the more assertive instruments. Once the *son* was finished, they picked up their stringed instruments: the *jarana*, the

¹⁷ Gutierrez was one of the early staff members of IVEC in the late 1980s.

¹⁸ “A natural amalgam through the rhythmic, through that African rhythm that is also ours. Because our rhythms are also Afro.” Personal recording.

¹⁹ I could not help but find it doubly purposeful that the *son* they perform this way was “El Camotal,” which means sweet potato field. It is not a very common *son* and is played infrequently and only in certain regions (Oseguera Rueda and García Ranz 2011). Yet tubers like sweet potatoes and yams are often associated with *afromestiza* cuisine, even though the sweet potato is native to the Americas and it is the yam, or *batata* that is an Old World introduction due to the Columbian exchange.

arpa (harp), the melodic requinto and the bass instrument known as the leona and continued their set.

Mono Blanco's authority derives from the group's role in son jarocho's revitalization in the 1970s—a moment in time when autochthonous forms of knowledge coalesced into a genre, something to be objectified and therefore authenticated. The jaranero movement was created in large part in response to the folklorization of son jarocho music, which many of my interlocutors derisively called “for show.” The all-white ensembles of the jarocho regional garb, and the trio of musicians who go from café to café hoping for a tourist to tip them for their troubles is considered a world apart from those who go to fandangos, who know not only chord progressions but also the narrative themes and tradition and ritual of the tarima and the proper moments to get on and off of it, when to dance forcefully or simply mark time, and the parts of the *sones* that require certain steps. The ten-line poems known as *décimas* are memorized, composed, and recited in fandango spaces and the genealogies of the most famous jaraneros and decimistas are common knowledge. History itself is also requisite knowledge for those involved in the jaranero movement.

This history entails at least a vague familiarity with the discourse of the third root, often with generic assignation of aspects of the music to specific “roots.” This leads to statements like the focus on nature is because of the indigenous, or the stringed instruments being the Spanish contribution. Percussion belongs to the third root, of course. However, unlike El Mono's lived experience with cultural fusion, the theories I have heard bandied about are far ranging—from the lack of drums being a result of them being taken away due to their communicative power in the flatlands of the sotavento's *llanuras costeras*, or coastal plains, to the close position of the feet while dancing being a carryover of when the enslaved danced with chains. The neat

assignment of qualities to roots and the stereotypes that bolster them exist despite the fact that the Movimiento Jaranero was at its origin an intellectual affair, as the scholar Rafael Figueroa recounted to me.

That *rescate* or rescue of the genre was not only in the face of its diminishment but also against the strength of the folkloric son jarocho. This created a space for the academic within the culture as well as a tendency to authenticate. The tight connection between the academic and the popular continues today. Most of the prominent scholars of son jarocho are also jaraneros. However, it is not merely the ethnographer's participant-observation. It is not mere method. Many scholars *convivir* in the fandango space, socializing with the very same people who may take back their historical findings for a history lesson during a workshop, or who they may quote in a new ethnographic piece of literature. The scholars and the practitioners know each other, live with each other. In literal ways, they *are* each other.

It was the first fandango in the cultural center El CaSon in months. The monthly schedule had been interrupted for a variety of reasons, including the touring schedule of Mono Blanco, who spearheaded the center's cultural efforts. This mini-inauguration of the space was a hot humid night. Álvaro Alcántara was among the tight semicircle of musicians ringing the tarima, the fandango's center. Earlier in the day he had sat behind a table, speaking into a microphone as he played his role as an academic. Tonight, he needed no microphone as he participated in the call and the response of the *son* that had been playing for the past twenty minutes. When the "una!" had been called, the signal to let everyone know that it was the final cycle of the chord progression, he wiped the sweat from his brow and joined a different semicircle, one comprised

of academics drinking their *Indio* beers and catching up. As he had told us in his conference panel, he is an academic, a rumbero, and a jaranero.²⁰

We were in the final stretch of the XX Afrocaribeño Festival, which, as Álvaro had mentioned earlier in the day, was where a lot of those participating musicians and academics, had “grown up together” as both scholars and people. This new semicircle included a visiting scholar from Colombia, the aforementioned Rafael Figueroa, Jessica Gottfried who has written extensively about son jarocho and who is an active and present personality in the port’s jaranero *flota*,²¹ and another scholar of the third root from Mexico City. Despite having attended a full day of talks and presentations as part of the Festival, they were lively and reminiscing in the garden of El CaSon, right by the recently cut, formerly majestic coconut tree. They were their own world within the *convivencia* of the fandango, yet not set apart from it.

I saw the same clique the next day in the zócalo during the closing concert for the Festival, which this year, contrary to claims of distancing through international music, ended with son jarocho. A group from Oaxaca was onstage performing a rather rousing and entertaining version of the *son* “La Iguana” complete with the dance moves imitating the animal. When another local academic of the sotavento and his friend from the region of Los Tuxtlas came to greet me, we had our own conversation about son jarocho. We were academics, but this same conversation could have been had with a group of enthusiasts. In fact, it is hard to say which “hat” people were wearing that night—that of the practitioner or the investigator. The lines blur and the positionalities overlap. The footings seem to follow the same paths.

²⁰ Other well-known jaranero-academics include: Antonio García de León formerly of *Zacamandú*, Rubí C. Oseguera Rueda formerly of *Chuchumbé* and *Son de Madera*, Juan Meléndez de la Cruz, and Jessica Gottfried. A similar dual role is among promoters and jaraneros, such as Gilberto “El Mono” Gutierrez of *Mono Blanco*, Patricio Hidalgo of *Afrojarocho*, Rafael Vázquez of Grupo Estanzuela, and Juan Campechano of *Mono Blanco*.

²¹ While *flota* translates as “fleet” in English, it is a local term for a social group akin to “crew”.

CHAPTER THREE: FROM TABLE TALK TO PUBLIC DANCING

“Identity, especially identity as “difference” (original, unique—not Spanish, not indigenous) has to be performed to be seen.”

—Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 98.

When Diana Taylor argued that difference was to be performed in order to be seen, she was explicitly discussing the ways in which Mexican intellectual José Vasconcelos’s idea of a mestizo nation as set forth in *La raza cósmica* (1925) “moved from the biological rootedness of the mestizo to the aesthetic realm of mestizaje” (Taylor 2003, 98). This move from the biological to the aesthetic prompted the emphasis on regionalized, typical folkloric portraits, whose diversity is evident today in any ballet folclórico performance in which different costumes match with different styles of music and dance depending on the region performed and seen. This is also the moment when the regional identity of Veracruz began to be whitewashed in both its sartorial and somatic representations. Those from Veracruz became associated with the white clothing of these regionalized types, which ignored the particular biological rootedness of the region—not to mention the class association of the word *jarocho* which in the process of aestheticizing mestizaje lost its Afro-indigenous, peasant reputation in favor of white lace dresses and white linen guayaberas.

Although formulated in the specific context of the worldwide eugenics movement and the need to build a nation after the Mexican Revolution, the idea of *mestizaje*, or racial mixing, continues to this day to act as the lodestar of Mexican identity. It is the reason many people deny that racism occurs in Mexico—“we have no racism because we are all Mexican”—with the notable (and safe) caveat always being the indigenous populations that continue to be derided and underserved. It is also why some Afro-Mexicans still face scrutiny and the threat of

deportation when mistaken as illegal immigrants,¹ so thoroughly has the African influence been written out of the Mexican's origin story in many parts of the nation. To this end, sociologist Christina A. Sue has identified the three pillars of Mexico's Postrevolutionary Racial Ideology as: 1) mestizaje, which she defines as "the embracement of race mixture and lauding of the mestizo"; 2) nonracism; and 3) nonblackness, the latter of which is facilitated by the former two (2013, 13-17).

However, nearly a century after Vasconcelos first imagined his cosmic race, jarocho publics, those who to recovery, recuperate and revitalize their African ancestry, are also working to perform identity as difference in order for it to be seen. Whereas many Mexicans who phenotypically bear their African ancestry are campaigning to be formally recognized as a subpopulation worthy of inclusion on the census and the subsequent rights and recognition, others are performing their African identity in order to make their regional difference seen. Jarocho publics are this latter group, using their African ancestry to literally be "original, unique—not Spanish, not indigenous," and have had to practice and perform it in order to make visible this claim. However, for this difference to be performed, it also has to be learned. This chapter and the next are about how the jarocho's difference—its Afro-Caribbean identity—is both being practiced and performed informally in everyday interactions as well as formally through the robust workshop culture proliferated across the port city of Veracruz. To fully understand these moves, however, one must first understand the figure of the jarocho vis-à-vis the rest of the nation.

¹ Témoris Grecko. "Afromexicanos: La discriminación visible." Proceso. <http://www.proceso.com.mx/480201/afromexicanos-la-discriminacion-visible> (accessed April 6, 2017).

To understand *lo negro* in Veracruz, which I have glossed as blackness, you must focus on jarocho culture and the various investments on different scales, both financial and otherwise, in that identity. In this chapter, I will look at the table talk among jarochos to see how the groupness of this ethnoregional term is consolidated and reaffirmed. It is in these smaller moments where it becomes clearer that instances of such talk comprise intimate performances that define and refine what people mean when they refer to themselves as a jarocho. The term is ubiquitous, both as a noun and an adjective, yet the only true consensus is around what constitutes the regional costume; when questioned about the specifics of the jarocho, trite sayings and the reliance on stereotyped attitudes like happiness eventually give way to not-so-declarative statements. Everyone is a jarocho, but what a jarocho is requires reiteration and maintenance.

This investment in being jarocho occurs on the individual, community, and state levels with the most obvious manifestation being the emphasis on *alegría*, or happiness. Happiness, however, is merely an example of a larger desire to make that which is said to be inherent in jarochos into something that is demonstrable. If chapter one argues how Veracruzans localize and internalize blackness, this chapter explores the work and performance required to maintain it. Because “happiness” has become synonymous with the jarocho, the investment in happiness is a performance of self. This is partly because the port has a reputation that is tied to its popularity as a domestic tourism site. Through tourism we see the investments of the state: top-down financing and a cyclical festival calendar that brings in revenue for the local economy. However, this only tells part of the story. The quieter, everyday investments sustain the happiness between headline-making events. Instead of using the quotidian to pivot into the spectacular, the end of the chapter lingers in the banal.

This chapter explores the variety of scales and constituents related to the performance of jarocho and what I term the “*rescate* of blackness”. *Rescate* has become the mode of engagement in the port’s cultural scene as jarocho publics treat various forms of intangible patrimony as if they are dying while simultaneously insisting that they are alive. Their concerted revitalization efforts look to both the state and to the community to forestall irrelevance, simultaneously demonstrating the expectation that the state invest in cultural heritage and the sense of shared obligation among the population. In this chapter I unpack an instance of table talk to highlight what—or who—is in need of saving. From there I attend to the festival as a venue of performance and a form of revitalization, in order to explore the two audiences of festivals and events in the port while tracing where the state’s investment ends and the community’s investment begins. As a foil, I use the nonoccurrence of a popular festival—the International Afro-Caribbean Festival—to highlight an instance where the state’s failure to invest in blackness revealed non-economic investments in the topic among non-state actors. Finally, the chapter reintroduces the character Blanca to look at the banal scale at which the *rescate* of blackness occurs, one in which the investment is not top-down or cyclical like the festival-as-event, but rather broadly distributed and ever present. Attending to performances, both large and small, organized and spontaneous, outward facing and inwardly motivated, reveals the ways in which blackness is revitalized in the city of Veracruz. By following the same character to explore different avenues of investment, this chapter traces the various modes in which blackness is revitalized and how it functions in the port city.

The lack of a self-identifying community of Afro-Mexicans in Veracruz helps us to avoid the reification of groups, a tendency that Rogers Brubaker urges us to go beyond in his essay “Ethnicity without Groups.” Furthermore, it facilitates what he advocates as the shift from

groups to groupness, a shift in which the latter is treated as fluid rather than fixed, enabling us “to treat groupness as an *event*, as something that ‘happens’” (2002, 168). To consider groupness as something which happens is to focus on processes rather than static facts in the world. This perspectival shift toward identification rather than identity lends itself to the metaphor of the *rescate* and my argument that blackness is performed and reaffirmed in these moments. Such an approach helps clarify that while blackness is a lived experience, it is not necessarily an inhabited one. Cognizant that the word “performance” invites a cynical interpretation that lends itself toward authenticity politics, I use the lens of sincerity which “highlights the ever-fleeting ‘liveness’ of everyday racial performances that cannot be completely captured by authenticating mediations of any kind” (Jackson Jr. 2005, 17).

For instance, ethnographer Christian Rinaudo (2010), in line with the “blackness without ethnicity” theory put forth by Livio Sansone (2003), argues that the youth culture in Veracruz has amounted to a desire to “act like a Black person” rather than an identification as black. While I agree with many of his observations, I interpret the sum of these performances as sincere evocations of local identity, rather than inauthentic shoehorning of imported or transnational stereotypes of what it means to be Black. Yet at root this performance has an interiority and deep commitment to localization even as it lends itself to making broader connections. In other words, the actions that suggest an intentional signaling of the so-named third root² are not motivated by black internationalism (Patterson and Kelley 2000) or a desire to enter into a diasporic relationship with other members of the African diaspora. Rather than an attempt to act black, it is

² The third root argues that there is African ancestry and influence in modern day Mexico along with the more traditionally named indigenous and Spanish ones. It is further unpacked in Ch. 2.

an attempt to be more jarocho. As the third root rhetoric becomes more deeply fixated in the jarocho persona, its performance doubles as performance of blackness.

Sincerity in the performance of blackness rests in the fact that the identity marker of choice remains jarocho rather than Afro-Mexican.³ This dual path to blackness is made possible by the historical association of black ancestry and jarocho character traits at the time of their crystallization. Blackness is found at the root of the jarocho stereotype rather than grafted onto it. The past thirty years of being told about their black heritage have created an organic path toward accommodation rather than requiring a belabored importation. Rather than an imposition, it is a recuperation. It is not the newness of the third root rhetoric, but rather its oldness that makes it compelling. Because the essence of the jarocho does not change with the revelation of a black past, blackness adopts an “always already” quality that enables locals to identify with blackness rather than identify as black. This identification has also extended into the national imaginary, allowing *lo negro* and its subsequent associations with happiness and partying to be marketable traits to attract outsiders. In this way, blackness has been coopted into large events and underscored in everyday ones, making it alternately explicit and implicit depending on its usefulness. This chapter uses invested performances to capture a holistic view of how the blackness of the jarocho is recuperated in moments large and small within the *Puerto jarocho*.

Jarochos in Popular Culture

The jarocho has proclaimed his uniqueness since the 19th century, dating back to when the jarocho was still an ethnoracial term for Afro-Indigenous peoples in the southern region of Veracruz state rather than a generic regional term applying to anyone from said state. For

³ The possibility of this shifting will be addressed in the conclusion of the dissertation.

example, the French traveler Lucian Biart wrote in 1862, “The isolation of the jarocho have made them a people apart, with their laws, customs, and traditions, and they consider their compatriots from other parts of the Republic as strangers that only deserve contempt” (15). What is more, historian Ricardo Pérez Montfort has argued that various mid-19th century chroniclers have marked a distinction not just between jarocho and people across the Republic, but also within the state of Veracruz, citing that writers “referred to “veracruzanos” as those who had European blood and to “jarocho” as those who were a mix of Indian with Black, perhaps with a tiny pint of white” (2007, 195).

Even as this racial distinction slowly disappeared, the uniqueness of Veracruz was at the forefront of their positioning. In the mid-20th century, as state powers increasingly developed the tourism industry, the image of Veracruz and its jarocho as unique became marketable, and the cooption of the jarocho becomes visible when reading across various media. Take for example the 1938 film *Tierra Brava* in which Joaquin Pardavé’s character Benito steps off the 7:40 train from Mexico City and is immediately accosted by pregoneros, or street criers, hawking their wares of coconut, pineapple, limes, and other tropical goods including rum. One man even accompanies himself with a maraca as Benito continues to walk away, smoking his cigar. In a following scene, Benito—still with his cigar—observes a group of musicians from his table in the famous *Portales*, the outdoor arches on one side the main plaza that are filled with restaurants and bars. When a man from the audience joins into the refrain claiming, “I’m going to dance,” another woman interjects singing he does not know how to dance rumba before eventually demonstrating how to dance “the good rumba” with her silent compatriot. Everyone in the scene is fixated on the woman and her partner, but Benito stands up and moves closer for a better view of this impromptu display of local culture, even giving a little shimmy of his own

near the end of the song. When she and the musicians begin to leave, Pardavé's character chats her up only for her to dismiss him and scoff when he expresses ignorance about what a fandango is after she says he can find her and everyone else there.

In a later fandango scene, the “everyone else” there is white until she and her partner—played by the famous Afro-Cuban rumba partners Rene and Estela (René Rivero Guillén and Ramona Ajón)—enter to perform a rumba in stark contrast to the son jarocho played and danced in the rest of the fandango scene. Their dress and dance style are not the only contrast—they, like the musicians in the earlier scene (including a not-yet-famous Compay Segundo of the legendary Buena Vista Social Club), are the only visibly Afro-Caribbean individuals present. Although Rene and Estela were famous Cuban dancers in the 1930s, their introduction, and the musicians supporting their dancing the Portales, work to naturalize their presence in Veracruz. Not only is the song they sing in the Portales, “Rumba en Cubanacán” by the Veracruzian composer Emilio Cantarell, Estela's remarks to Benito make a clear insider–outsider distinction reminiscent of Biart's observation of the jarochos' singularity and tendency towards contempt. At the same time, however, this golden-age-of-cinema rendering of the jarocho culture also suggests the colonial distinction between the “fandango popular” of the mixed-ancestry “castas” and the “fandango real” that was exclusively for Spaniards and creole-born Spaniards (García de León 2006, 31) through its stark racial segregation. Nevertheless, it works to present both veracruzanos and jarochos as local to the port city. Moreover, the everyday life of the port city is presented as foreign, unique, and to a degree, Caribbean.

For contrast, in 1946, James A. “The Voice of the Globe,” FitzPatrick takes a different approach to making visible Veracruz's uniqueness when he tells an intended US audience that Veracruz is “more Spanish than any other city in Mexico.” In the travel documentary, “Visit to

Veracruz,” FitzPatrick even proclaims, “Regardless of what they may have done to the contrary, it must be admitted that the old Spanish conquistadors brought to the New World imperishable contributions from their mother country, such as architecture, music, and the spirit of romance.” This voiceover accompanies images of blonde-haired women on tiled balconies overlooking roads that still have men on horseback traversing them while cars drive by in the background. With a transition calling locals, “a people who know how to entertain visitors,” the scene changes to a gaggle of women dressed in the traditional white jarocho costume dancing in two lines with a soundtrack of jaunty classical music that clearly does not match the music being played in the foreground. As the camera pans across the scene, it eventually focuses on two young girls also dressed as jarocho. Over this image, FitzPatrick explains that, “Folk dancing is an inherent tradition here, for even the children learn to dance as soon as they are able to stand on their feet.” The shot of the two toddlers fades into one showing a “happy and carefree bevy of Veracruz maidens who find pleasure in the more simple [sic] diversions of life and take great pride in the preservation of the legends and traditions which they inherited from their ancestors.” Unlike today, there was no mention of any of those ancestors being of African descent.

These two mid-20th century artifacts reveal an image of Veracruz that is in transition as the joy and fun-loving behavior of the jarocho—which was originally attributed to the African aspect of their ancestry—became regionalized. Pérez Montfort argues that this transference is partly due to the Post-Revolutionary moment when the consolidation of the stereotype led to its whitening. Contrary to most places, however, it was the indigenous root—not the African one—that was practically erased from the typified jarocho, with the Black component working as a “distinctive trait” (1997, 150-1). Pérez Montfort in focusing on this moment of typifying the

jarocho argues that the official discourse worked to identify itself through constant references to a supposed “popular soul” as those in power worked to reconstitute the stereotype (150).

The Jarocho as Ethno-regionally Distinct

“¡Gracias a los chilangos, los hoteles se llenan!” Blanca declared, her fingers tense around the cigarette she held angled away from her face. Her tattooed eyebrows had crept increasingly higher as she quietly listened to the five straight minutes or so of the porteños⁴ around the table engaging in a favorite pastime—disparaging chilangos.⁵ The sharpness of her tone cut through the relaxed and teasing atmosphere that had settled around the table. Blanca is no wallflower, and the exclamation that it was thanks to the chilangos that the hotels filled was both a defense and an accusation. For all the sins that jarocho can—and do—lay at the feet of chilangos, the maligned group served a very real and present good for the port city, at least financially. Veracruz is a major domestic tourism destination,⁶ with many of its millions of visitors hailing from Mexico City. And while Blanca was largely right, her not-so-gentle interjection hinted at a less quantifiable function the chilango plays among the locals in Veracruz. Neither the financial contribution nor the conspicuous consumption of visitors like chilangos were the target of the table’s well-worn complaints; in fact, the disparagement was more about constituting the in-group than villainizing the outgroup. In ribbing the defenseless—save, of course, Blanca, who herself is a chilanga—the group around the table were performing just as surely as the group of musicians playing the son rhythms that served as our background music.

⁴ People from the port city. I will use this term for clarity since the nebulous nature of the term “jarocho” is in discussion here. However, it is important to note that this is a category of analysis rather than practice. While some interlocutors preferred the term porteño over jarocho, they are more often than not used interchangeably, with jarocho being the more common of the two.

⁵ A somewhat derogatory term used to refer to people from Mexico City.

⁶ In 2016, it was the 6th most visited domestic destination. <http://www.veracruz.gob.mx/blog/2016/11/03/veracruz-mantiene-su-liderazgo-en-turismo-de-congresos-2/>

It did not matter that Blanca herself is a “chilanga”— though it is unclear if everyone was aware of that fact. She and her husband are one of the regulars at cultural events, often getting a salutation from a given performer on stage, or the microphone at a forum to add anecdotes or information based on their collective expertise. If not jarocho, then “jarocho de corazón”⁷ as people say to praise those who, while not born in Veracruz, demonstrate an appreciation or affinity with norms, traits, and characteristics associated with the jarocho. Perhaps that is why our table slipped into the commonplace conversation in which the figure of the chilango helped to crystallize that of the jarocho.⁸ Blanca may have been a chilanga, but she was not an outsider. She was not an audience.

We were seated in the Callejón Toña la Negra, a renovated walkway named in honor of the most famous person from the Barrio de La Huaca, a “barrio bravo,” or rough neighborhood that claims as its fame being the oldest continuously existing neighborhood to anyone who would care to listen. Toña la Negra, born María Antonia del Carmen Peregrino Álvarez, is not merely a neighborhood legend; she is one of the most famous Afro-Mexicans, a singer and actress, and the muse to another famous Veracruzano, the composer Agustín Lara, whose statue once stood beside hers beneath a palm tree in the heart of La Huaca. Toña la Negra also happened to be the great aunt to two of the people around the table, children of the more modestly renowned musician David Rodríguez Peregrino, known as El Negro Peregrino. Whereas Laura has remained in Veracruz like her father, her brother Toño followed the path of his aunt to Mexico City as he continued the family tradition of being a successful singer. He had returned for the

⁷ Jarocho at heart

⁸ In many ways this is mutual. There are theories that the term chilango originated in Veracruz to refer to people from the interior.

inaugural festival that brought us all together and was regaling the table with nostalgic stories when he was not singing a requested song and the subsequent audience-demanded encore with the sonero group. Toño's presence was cause for celebration, of course, but it also sparked the conversation that piqued Blanca's ire. Not exactly a prodigal son, he and his nostalgic reminiscences of the port nevertheless set off the conversation in which Mexico (City)⁹ was inevitably the foil to Veracruz, and not a good one at that.

While Toño's presence may have sparked this particular conversation, porteños often engage in this type of talk in which they perform their groupness by contrasting themselves to other types—most often xalapeños¹⁰ and chilangos. To borrow a phrase from the famous *son* “La bamba,” jarocho have always had “una poca de gracia y otra cosita,” a little bit of grace and little something else that sets them apart from the rest of Mexicans. Even before the Third Root Movement, the uniqueness of the jarocho has been noticed by visitors and curated by interested parties. The curation project is more readily apparent in large events like the pre-Lenten Carnival, the international festivals that espouse and rely on regional commonalities, or even the annual homages and gatherings to celebrate musicians and genres of music. These types of performances will be discussed at length, but at this moment it is important to remember that the form of regionalized talk is a performance and a practice that does not cater to or expect an audience. Jarocho refer to the “otra cosita,” in everyday moments that do not require a schedule, budget, or graphics department. More than that, they are moments that do not need or depend on the occupancy status of the hotels, despite Blanca's assertion.

⁹ Mexico City is most often referred to simply as Mexico among veracruzanos, just as the city of Veracruz is often referred to as the Port.

¹⁰ Those from Xalapa, the state capital of Veracruz.

More than just common, the practice is not even particularly new. Recall the mid-19th century traveler Lucan Biart who with foreigner's eyes noted how jarochoes held themselves apart and above their Mexican compatriots. Biart attributed this distinction to their isolation, but with the steady influx of visitors into the port both by land and by sea, it is more figurative than literal. Moreover, this trait is not unique to jarochoes. As Pierre Bourdieu has argued, "to exist socially means also to be perceived, and perceived as distinct" (1992, 224). That Veracruz is a tourism destination doubles this need for distinction; it does not cause it. That is to say, the distinction has economic benefits and is marketable, but is not the product of interested parties alone. This is made evident in the fact that regional pride is as often reaffirmed among themselves, in the privacy of late evening table talk as it is in the promotional material generated by professionals in the capital.

These conversations reveal in broad sketches how contemporary jarochoes make themselves distinct among a cast of types while also revealing the characteristics in which porteño jarochoes¹¹ are most invested in as part of their self-making. When faced with the question of who or what is a jarocho, many people approach a response in different ways. Some use the broadest definition, which identifies anyone from the state of Veracruz as a jarocho. When asked explicitly if those from the state capital—xalapeños—are jarochoes, the very same people begin to equivocate. Among those who begin the response with more refined geographic delimitations, the boundaries are fluid, even as people assign the culture to the state's sotavento region. At times Veracruz is the northern limit of the sotavento, at other times, it is just outside

¹¹ I use this term to indicate the narrowness of this iteration of the jarocho. From the national perspective, all people from the state of Veracruz are jarocho, which would include xalapeños. Within the state, however, there are marked differences between those in the sotavento, of which the city of Veracruz is in the northern limit, and those from the northern region of the state, hence the policing of the line between xalapeños and porteño jarochoes.

of its region. Other people answer the question by going back in time to describe the various theories about the origin of the term. Some theories suggest they are called jarocho because they used a jara, or spear to hunt; others say it referred to the class of people who handled excrement and were therefore social outcasts. Regardless of the theory adopted, these types of people nevertheless make a distinction between what the term meant and to whom it currently refers, thus tracing the equivocation of the group of people who answer with a geographic response rather than an etymological one.

Despite the ambiguity around the term, the consensus is that jarochos are *alegre*, fun-loving, and rowdy, yet warm and open. However, because jarochos are known to be happy, happiness becomes something that must be demonstrable and tangible. The penchant for talking loudly, for *convivencia*¹² whether it be at a café, at a night of public dancing, or a festival, are signature features of life in the port. These norms are not seen as “cultura,” a term that is associated with high culture and ceded to the xalapeños in the capital. Their northern neighbors may have culture, but porteño jarochos have fun. This division of labor is often justified by pseudo-naturalistic reasoning, having the personalities of the jarocho and the xalapeño develop from the differences in geography and climate. Many in the port blame the imagined xalapeño’s reservation on the colder, wetter environment of the mountainous region of the state with its *chipi-chipi*, or drizzle. In comparison, the heat and humidity of the port city complements the rowdiness and liveliness of its people. The distinction between the two major cities is partly due to their rival scopes of influence within the state. The sotavento is its own region in the state and Veracruz is its de facto capital, whether it is positioned just within or just without the imagined

¹² Harmonious living together

border.¹³ Regardless of the power dynamic between the state capital and a cultural capital—lowbrow as that culture may be—the nation’s capital offers its own set of characteristics against which jarocho can contrast themselves.

Because Veracruz is a major destination for domestic tourism, there is a rhythm to visitors coming into the city throughout the year. In that way, Blanca had a point when she defended those from her birthplace. Many of the millions of visitors who pass through Veracruz are from Mexico City, and yet *chilangos*—which for many remains a derogatory term¹⁴—are disparaged as vaguely untrustworthy in the everyday conversations not unlike the one that opens this section. Among porteños, Mexico City and its inhabitants continue to be typecast as dangerous and disrespectful despite the growing infamy and insecurity Veracruz currently experiences. Part of this hypocrisy derives from the intimacy felt in the Port. While the city has over 600,000 inhabitants, for subsets of the city—particularly those in the historic downtown area—it preserves a small-town feel. “Veracruz es un huevo,”¹⁵ a friend once remarked to me after we repeatedly ran into mutual acquaintances on the street. While habits are slowly responding to increased violence, people continue to live their lives largely in public which contributes to the perceived intimacy of public space.

In this environment, porteños often broach the growing precarity of their town through the lens of nostalgia, a tactic that both disavows the autochthony of the violence and reaffirms the inherent nature of their perceived openness. The older generations recall a time when

¹³ In the eyes of the state, not only is Veracruz in the sotavento, the region itself is much smaller than the “From Veracruz southward” concept that many people express.

<http://www.inafed.gob.mx/work/enciclopedia/EMM30veracruz/regionalizacion.html>

¹⁴ The term jarocho similarly remains derogatory for some.

¹⁵ Literally, Veracruz is an egg. Not to be confused with the call and response, Jarocho, a huevo! Which roughly translates into, “Jarocho, heck yeah!”

windows were always opened, and one could even sleep with their doors unlocked. The climate is again partly to blame for this literal openness. Unlike the cold of both Xalapa and Mexico City, the open entryways of yore had a pragmatic reason. However, porteños of today find symbolism in them as well. Like their doors (and despite their casual aspersions against chilangos and xalapeños), they consider themselves to be an open, welcoming people. The city itself has been referred to as “an open window to the Caribbean” (Castañeda 2008), as well as an able and gracious host to visitors. However, in playing host, the jarocho stereotype of being happy and fun-loving or warm and hospitable slips between being second nature and being unnatural. While it is true that the hospitality industry is happy that visitors like chilangos fill their hotels and consume their services, the happiness and openness that jarochos claim to be endemic at times waffles between a personal investment and an impersonal commitment.

Perhaps more striking than the geocultural rivalries enacted in these reaffirmations of who and how jarochos are is the historical roots and ethnoracial antecedents that linger in the contemporary moment. Historians like Ricardo Pérez Montfort have relied on travelogues, chronicles, and dictionaries written by foreigners and Mexicans alike to understand where the term came from and to whom it applied. In 1850, for example, the Mexican statesman Miguel Lerdo de Tejada who was born in the port of Veracruz described the jarocho as the result of the successive union of indigenous people and those of African descent (Perez Montfort 2001, 132). In the late 19th century, the “immense Cuban emigration” to Veracruz had popularized the term on the island and garnered jarocho an entry in José Miguel Macías’s 1885 Cuban dictionary. The first definition defines it as a rural person from the hinterland of the city of Veracruz while the second simply defines jarocho as an individual of African ancestry. In his editor’s note, Macías outlines the various theories of the word’s origin since it is not derived from an indigenous

language. In exploring one possible etymology that links it to the word *jaro*, meaning color, he notes that while it is true that the term contemporarily applies to rural folk, at the beginning it was exclusively applied as a generic nomination for “los mulatos, chinos, zambos ó lobos y demas individuos de razas etiópica y americana con mezcla de la caucásica de Blumenbach” (Macías 1885, 724).¹⁶ Even as the term was expanded to refer to anyone living in the outskirts of Veracruz, the recent past of the term *jarocho* being a generic term for *castas* having African ancestry had not been forgotten. This occurred in more than just an editor’s note, it was also the case in popular usage. Pérez Montfort has found that up until the middle of the 19th century, the difference between “veracruzanos” and “jarochos” was made clear in in the writings of chroniclers. Based on chroniclers of everyday life, he has found that the former term was used for those who had European blood while the later was for those who were an Afro-Indigenous mixture, with perhaps “una pintita de blanco”, a touch of white blood (2007, 195).¹⁷

Moreover, while *jarocho* has largely lost its ethnoracial connotations, its transformation into a regional term was never consummate, and the recent accommodation of third root rhetoric suggests a further evolution into a somewhat ethnoregional term.¹⁸ In fact, in those very same sources, there is an ambiguity regarding which takes precedence—social status or regional birthright. The ongoing process of de-ethnicizing the *jarocho* was a consequence of the nationalistic ideologies of the post-Revolutionary era and the desire to *blanquear*, or whiten, the populace. In Veracruz, this practice lead to an elimination of explicit reference to African ancestry, but not, as Pérez Montfort argues, the erasure of *lo negro*, blackness itself. Like the

¹⁶ The mention of Johann Blumenbach refers to his classification system of human races: Caucasian, Mongolian, Malayan, Ethiopian, and American.

¹⁷ “...los escritores se referían a los “veracruzanos” como aquellos que tenían sangre europea y a los “jarochos” como a aquellos que eran mezcla de indio con negro, quizá con alguna pintita de blanco.”

¹⁸ The current ethnicization of the term in light of the new census is the topic of the dissertation’s conclusion.

pringa of black blood that jarocho currently claim, there was an indelibility to blackness that survived the whitening.

The first half of the twentieth century gives credence to this argument. In the famous anthem of Veracruz “Tres Veces Heroica,” for example, the first line proclaims ‘somos negritos’, we are black people, while the beginning of the second stanza claims that they have the blood of Cuauhtémoc. There is no mention of Spanish blood at all. In 1939, for example, the Spanish writer Juan Rejano wrote that “there are moments, without knowing why, one has the impression that Veracruz was the entrance to a country where the mestizaje has been done not by the Indians, but by black people” (Rejano 1978).¹⁹ This point of view echoes today as academics revise the third root rhetoric to argue that assigning ordinal numbers to the “roots” of the Mexican not only continues to downplay the African influence, but in many cases does not accurately portray the literal importance it has had in certain regions. It remains to be seen if this revision to the corrective rhetoric of the third root will be successful; what is without a doubt is how much jarocho have reversed from the whitening of the jarocho, at least in the abstract. If as Rogers Brubaker suggests, we rethink ethnicity not as a substance or thing in the world, but rather in “relational, processual, dynamic, eventful and disaggregated terms” (2002, 167). This new moment, which I call a blackening, is a process that is not a reversal of what occurred a century ago. Rather than an erasure or a forgetting, this new process is one of accommodation, of re-membering the jarocho as having African ancestry, and currently of centering that remembrance in the texts and subtexts of the stories they tell themselves about themselves.

¹⁹ “Hay momentos en que sin saber por qué, tiene uno la impresión de que Veracruz es la entrada a un país donde el mestizaje no lo han hecho los indios sino los negros.”

More than just indelible, *lo negro*, has become valorized; not just claimed, but proclaimed. However, in that proclamation blackness belongs in the first order to the jarocho, and in the second in individualized jarochos. The abstracted blackness is placed on the abstracted jarocho. *Lo negro* is indelibly linked to *lo jarocho*, not to a particular person. Nevertheless, the re-essentialization of jarocho stereotypes as Black is a claim to blackness once removed. Because the black ancestry has always-already been the distinction of the jarocho, who in turn has always-already been happy, bawdy, and fun, the elision is smooth and unchallenged. This second-order claiming is done through talk like that which occurred at the table, but it is also made official through the actions of the state and the cultural promoters that make a living by creating and sustaining the public discourse about Veracruz and its relationship to *lo negro*. The conversation we had that sparked was generic, but its specific context also matters.

Making Claims through Festivals

While the night of Blanca's censure was special due to its official inclusion in an inaugural festival, the event was familiar. On any given Saturday you can find a group of people sitting in plastic chairs around a plastic table as a group of local musicians play familiar tunes. On this Saturday, we happened to be gathered in the Callejón Toña la Negra to enjoy the live music playing for the second night of the inaugural Festival de la Gorda y la Picada in the Barrio de la Huaca. The first night had been a somewhat contrived "traditional" fandango highlighting son jarocho, and tonight was billed as a "baile tradicional," or traditional dance, in which local son montuno groups played, with a brief interlude for a danzón performance.

Though advertised as inaugural, it was a performance *in medias res*, with the festival functioning as the means to two different ends. On the one hand, the festival worked to place

local foodstuffs collectively known as *antojitos* in a higher level of importance; on the other hand, it worked to celebrate La Huaca as a unique place in Veracruz. Though the festival played the role of the proverbial “one stone”, the “two birds” were in fact birds of a feather, to thoroughly mix metaphors. That the festival was working to elevate everyday fare and to attract attention to an ignored corner of the historic center speaks to broader efforts to *rescatar*—translatable as to rescue or to revive—the popular in Veracruz. That blackness is experiencing a renaissance in the process of rescuing popular culture in general is more evidence of this ethos and a reversal of the movement from black popular culture to generalized popular culture theorized by Stuart Hall (1993). In large part, the preferred mode of rescue relies primarily on attention. Just as the third root movement has brought attention to something that was already there, festivals like this one worked to bring attention to preexisting places and objects.

As with many of these types of events in the port city, the audience for the live music far outstripped that of the academically-oriented affairs. The fandango, which historically was a way to end the workday, has become a default way to open cultural events. Live son music has been the soundtrack of choice for the public dancing that takes place during such events. Enthusiasts of these genres of music, therefore, show up to the evening events to enjoy the music, and passively consume the particulars of a given festival through the opening comments.

Nevertheless, many of us around the table had been at the academic forum at the Instituto Veracruzano de la Cultura (IVEC) earlier that day during which the *antojitos* which we were celebrating—the puffed, fried tortilla filled with refried beans called a *gordita* and the pinched-edged fried tortilla topped with salsa, onion, and cheese known as the *picada*—had been declared authentically porteño, argued to be healthy, somehow, and all but elevated to the level of cuisine. These foodstuffs, which have analogues across the Mexican Republic, became loaded with local

significance in this first festival which was also in its own way a celebration to the Barrio de la Huaca itself.

As the oldest continuously existing neighborhood, a lot of traditional activities are said to have originated in La Huaca—the *danzón*, son music, Carnival, and now, *picadas* and *gorditas*. By valorizing the local *antojitos*, organizers worked to particularize foodstuffs in a port city that does not have a strong gastronomical identity compared to other major cities and tourism destinations in Mexico.²⁰ It was not the only inaugural food festival that year to highlight a local dish—months earlier, there was the first festival to the *volován*, a pastry turnover filled with meat that arrived with the French in the mid-19th century. This festival, however, differed from the Festival de la Gorda y la Picada in its scale, state support, and location. Whereas the former took place in the main plaza, had the full support of the city, including the presence of the mayor, and include forty *volovaneros* distributing some three thousand *volovanes* to locals and tourists alike,²¹ the latter festival was organized by the neighborhood’s cultural promoters, sponsored by local businesses, and occurred at the end of a corridor in the IVEC and in a block-long walkway outside of the typical tourists’ tract.

Beyond these indicators, one can see another difference in the reporting. For example an editorial in the local newspaper, *El Dictamen*, focused more on the Barrio de la Huaca than on the foodstuffs for offer, having taken their cue from the organizers themselves.²² Whereas the festival to the imported French snack item drew a larger crowd and targeted locals and tourists

²⁰ Beyond the *pescado a la veracruzana*, a way to prepare fish (usually red snapper) that involves a tomato-based sauce, capers, and olives, there are not many signature dishes originating in the port. The *lechero*, a coffee and milk drink theatrically poured in cafes, is another distinctive dish.

²¹ <http://www.veracruzmunipicio.gob.mx/noticias/un-exito-el-primer-festival-del-volovan/>

²² <http://eldictamen.mx/2016/08/columnas/editorial/hoy-da-inicio-el-primer-festival-de-la-gorda-y-la-picada-en-la-huaca/>

alike with the promise of free food, the festival to the locally created foods intentionally occurred in a smaller space and represented the work of neighborhood activists and their ongoing mission to “*rescatar*”, or save the Barrio de la Huaca. Tourists sampling the food were not the aim of the festival organizers; instead, it was to use the festival as a mechanism to bring attention to their neighborhood—to both its cultural contribution and its current condition. While there are various factors and conflicts of characters that mar the efforts for revitalization, there is little discussion of whether the neighborhood’s *rescate* is a worthy goal for which to strive. The Gorda and Picada Festival will probably never be a tourism-generating event despite the enthusiasm organizers have for its future, but the script it follows is reminiscent of one of the most successful revivals experienced in the port.

When Blanca exclaimed that it was thanks to the *chilangos* that the hotels filled, she was most probably referring to the high season during which even rents go up. The state’s tourism department, which in 2016 was allotted well over 75 million pesos from the state’s overall budget,²³ was first created in 1943 (Wood 2004, 162), and has since been quite busy. Two of the most important events of the high season are the pre-Lenten festival Carnival and Easter Week. While both holidays may be related to religious events, holiness is not the reason why people flock to Veracruz. And flock they do. Hotels are estimated to be 99% filled during these holidays with about 95% of the tourists in the Port being domestic tourists (Wood 2010). This massive influx of people—over a million people—is not an accidental, but rather the result of the post-Revolutionary effort by businessmen and state leaders to make Veracruz a domestic tourism destination. Carnival, too, was revitalized, though the idea of *rescatar* had not taken the hold it has today.

²³ <http://www.elchiltepin.com/aprueba-congreso-de-veracruz-presupuesto-estatal-para-2016/>

They have certainly succeeded; as Blanca said, the hotels are filled. As are the streets and *callejones*, the *zócalo*, the *malecón*, the restaurants, the aquarium, and any other public space. The local economy, both the informal and formal sides of it, benefit from the influx of millions of pesos, but all of this comes at a cost—that cost being the “natural *alegría*” of the *porteños*, and in some ways the naturalness of the “natural hospitality and friendliness of the locals” that a 1930 editorial in *El Dictamen* argued would undoubtedly shine through (Wood 2010, 93-94). Since its revival in 1925 after years of official nonobservance, Veracruz’s Carnival has become the second largest popular festival in Latin America behind Rio de Janeiro’s. And as Andrew Grant Wood has proven (2004; 2010), the role of *El Dictamen* is critical to understanding how.

Through an analysis of newspaper clippings, Wood traces how an event which organizers originally imagined as a local affair, became such a large phenomenon. By 1928, an editorial already expressed a vision of carnival as an “event that can bring to the city one of the most important economic activities of the present age: tourism” (Wood 2010, 93). A year later, in 1929, American tourists favorably compared the festival to Coney Island’s Mardi Gras, citing that the Carnival in Veracruz was “*más alegre*” because the local event was more “*vehemente y contagiosa*”, more passionate and contagious (Wood 2004, 164-5). In fact, that assessment is codified in the festival’s nickname: “*El Más Alegre del Mundo*”, the happiest in the world. However, that happiness is not quite as “*vehemente y contagiosa*” as before, and a different sort of contagion, known as exasperation, has taken a toll on the “natural” happiness and hospitality that was touted in the 1920s.

Happiness is certainly a selling point of the festival, and the monetary success suggests that people are still buying it. But the recent additions of the *Diosas de la Alegría*—the goddesses of happiness—and the newest addition, the *Guardián de la Alegría*—the Guardian of

Happiness, who in his lamé briefs serves as the male counterpart to the small group of women in bedazzled bikini sets and parade tights, suggest that organizers are trying to manufacture what was once considered as natural a resource as the warm weather that represented a welcomed escape for tourists from the interior. In other words, many porteños are ambivalent or even unhappy when Carnival comes around. My former landlady, for example, regularly locks up and leaves town.

Visitors fill the hotels, and the streets, *and* the private residences that hang their homemade signs advertising space for rent. Billboards leading out from the airport begin the inundation of advertisements, as if the visitors do not know why they are there. One advertisement sponsored by the beer company *Sol* riffs off the classic Las Vegas slogan, “*Lo que pasa en Carnaval se queda en Carnaval!*”²⁴ *Sol*, in fact, inundates the scene with signs hanging from each streetlamp post on the parade route from Veracruz to the neighboring municipality of Boca del Rio. Licensed, privately-owned stands flank both sides of the six lane Boulevard, the modern location for the parade route that already feels too small. Another ad campaign reads, “*Descubre como termina tu Carnaval...*”, “Find out how your Carnival ends...”. Little did I know at the time that mine would end absolutely exasperated with that year’s international pop earworm and seeking respite in the familiar, less spectacularly happy place—the Plazuela where the same local *son* band played at the same time, despite the competition put up by the international star Miguel Bosé, blocks away on the Macroplaza. The Plazuela, incidentally, was also full.

That little moment of respite speaks to the way in which the fissures caused by Carnival are not wholly antagonistic. Many locals comment on how crowded it is, how petty theft goes

²⁴ What happens in Carnival, stays in Carnival!

up, how debauchery mires the public sphere. But few wish the tourists would go away completely. Blanca's defense loses its bite because the complaints against chilangos and other visitors are toothless. Instead, Carnival is a moment of interaction between the port city and the rest of the country; it is a moment shot through with intimacy and performance. It is the co-mingling of regionalism and nationalism—and increasingly internationalism. As the port authority continues to section off the port itself from the city, Veracruz increasingly becomes less so a port of entry for foreigners into Mexico, but rather one for Mexicans into a Caribbean culture. The friction, however, that foments the unhappiness during the “Happiest Carnival in the World” is more to do with the delocalization of the festival than anything is.

For this reason, even the modern-day Carnival needs rescuing according to the new president of the Carnival Committee, Lic. Luis Antonio Pérez Fraga. This time, however, instead of being rescued from obscurity, it needs to be rescued from itself and the ways in which it has become unfamiliar from what it once was. Including the 2017 slogan of “Devolviendo al Pueblo Su Carnaval” (Returning to the People Their Carnival), the new president has made public statements about his desire to reign in the alienation some have felt with regards to the festival. Mary Rumbas and Juan Carnaval—allegorical figures who were most recently represented by a Cuban and a Brazilian model respectively—have been reimagined and will now be portrayed by porteños rather than foreigners.²⁵ The new director argued on the local radio station *XEU*, “This is not the carnival of Viña del Mar; It is the Carnival of Veracruz.” Juan Carnival will now be the gentleman with the longest time in the Carnival and Mary Rumbas has been changed to Mamá

²⁵ Although these professional models are rarely Mexican, that does not mean they cannot be misidentified as such. An image of the model Edgardo Escobar from his tenure as Juan Carnival still circulates as one of the first hits when you Google Image Search “Afro-Mexican.” In the image, he is dressed in modified jarocho garb—a sleeveless guayabera, red handkerchief, and four cornered hat, passively perpetuating the association of jarochos with blackness. Escobar is Venezuelan.

Rumba and will also be the woman with the longest participation.²⁶ At the end of his announcement he makes the aside that there would no longer be “gente extranjera” and says under his breath, “yo no sé que tenia que hacer...mas que para la foto.”²⁷

Part of the mission to return Carnival to the people included a survey of 15 questions soliciting the public’s opinion on a range of issues from the number of parades to have to the musical acts to invite. He and the committee have also pledged to bring Carnival back to the heights it had in the 1980s, including the revival of popular dances. Not only will it include large Carnival mask stating “Bienvenidos a la capital mundial de la alegría,”²⁸ he also promised that they will have a tarima²⁹ on every street from Ocampo to the zócalo with local salsa groups.³⁰

As part of his campaign, he also pledged to make Carnival self-sufficient, and claims they will raise the 70 million pesos required from donations. This pledge is partly in response to the uncertainty around the state budget and the need for more control. Money has become an increasingly pressing issue in Veracruz as corruption on the state level has emptied the budget,³¹ left several public servants unpaid, and forced the abandonment of cultural programs. It is unclear how much this situation has affected Carnival itself and how much is pretense. There are still multiple nights of concerts and several parades across the long weekend of festivities.

Non-Occurrence as an Event

²⁶ <http://www.xeu.com.mx/nota.cfm?id=864153>

²⁷ I don’t know what [foreigners] have to do with [Carnival]...except for the photos.”

²⁸ Welcome the world capital of happiness.

²⁹ Wooden platform for dancing.

³⁰ <http://carnavaldeveracruz.com.mx/serauncarnavalautosuficiente/>

³¹ The ex-governor Javier Duarte, is currently in custody after fleeing the country and stands accused of having laundered state money in several overseas ventures. It was recently reported that the state lost over \$865 million dollars in 2015. <http://www.univision.com/noticias/corruptcion/desvio-de-dinero-lujosas-propiedades-y-caballos-pura-sangre-asi-dejo-javier-duarte-en-quebra-a-veracruz>

“Can you believe they cancelled the Afrocaribeño!” he exclaimed as passed each other in the callejón. I cannot rightly say that I know him, but our paths cross often in the historic downtown of Veracruz. He was a denizen of the Plazuela, a member of the constant population that was always observing, never dancing. On occasion, the smell of liquor is on his breath, but he is generally a quiet fellow. The first time we ever spoke, he parroted to me what I was doing in the Port. This surveillance was a bit unsettling, but Veracruz “es un huevo,” after all. I suppose I stood out. We eventually did know each other in that way that people who share common spaces know each other. We had that type of relationship where you always acknowledge each other’s presence, but you would not go idle away an afternoon together in a café. Because we had seen each other at various events in IVEC, in Atarazanas, in the Plazuela, perhaps he assumed I was the ideal interlocutor with whom to express his disgust. He railed at the injustice of it all before ending our impromptu meeting with a “¡Qué asco!” before going on his way. How disgusting indeed.

The scheduled 21st edition of the International Afro-Caribbean Festival was canceled with little fanfare but a fair amount of outrage. My casual acquaintance in the callejón was not the only one upset at the sudden news. El Chivo, the street parker whose territory included the street perpendicular to the Plazuela mentioned it. A group chat of son jarocho enthusiasts on the social media platform Whatsapp mentioned it. Staff members of IVEC—members who had already planned the academic forum of the Afrocaribeño and were simply waiting for the funds to be released—mentioned it. *I* mentioned it. As my acquaintance had noticed in his short diatribe, organizers had even attempted to downsize the Afrocaribeño to a single event in the Teatro de la Reforma, but that could not rescue the festival this year.

The non-occurrence of the Afrocaribeño was an event in and of itself. This festival was legitimately *missed* by locals, and not purely for the potential tourism revenue. The hotels did not fill with visitors, but more urgently, the public spaces did not fill with foreign and local musicians playing for an oversized audience. Of course, there were still local musicians playing and people dancing—it is, after all, Veracruz. But the specialness of the Afrocaribeño became even more apparent with its cancellation. As my acquaintance implied, even a drastically downsized event, limited to one day—and indoors!—would have been better than nothing at all. For those who are even remotely connected to the cultural scene in Veracruz, it *was* disgusting that one of the oldest, most successful festivals was so unceremoniously cancelled without a by-your-leave. Yet its cancellation does not immediately imply that the Afro-Caribbeanness of Veracruz needs revitalization. The festival fomented it, but it has life outside of the multi-day celebration that generally happened in August.

The abruptness of the cancellation was in part due to the chronic disorganization surrounding it.³² At least for the past five years, there has been a certain degree of precarity around the festival, regarding both its dates and its scope. It has been suspended before and seasonally shifted from late summer to early spring, which is why the 20th anniversary of a festival that started in 1994 fell in 2015. During the years I have conducted research, there has always been a suddenness to the festival, where everyone seems to anticipate its arrival, but remain uncertain of the actual dates. At least on the academic side of the festival, there is a mood that they have done their part to the extent of their abilities, a sense of preparation without guarantee that the full “performance” will ever occur.

³² Many of my interlocutors—non-staff of IVEC—linked this disarray to the administration in power, arguing that cultural events suffered because the governor was not interested in the arts.

This anticipation is also perceptible among locals, the primary audience of the festival. Because dates are impossible to know for certain, there is readiness among them as well, a “should be around this time” mood in the mid-summer weeks. Even though the academic forum does not enjoy the same attendance of the musical side of the event, it is nevertheless robustly attended by non-academics, and is one of the primary disseminators of knowledge regarding the Caribbeaness of Veracruz. The festival itself is often the first piece of evidence everyday people cite when defending the claim that Veracruz is Caribbean. Rather than merely exploring the cultural ties Veracruz has with the rest of the region, the festival itself has slowly come to stand in as evidence. At the same time, those involved since its inception have critiqued the ways in which the spectacular aspects of the festival—including its nightly free music events—have overtaken the didactic part of the festival, arguing that it has evolved into a vehicle predominantly for entertainment purposes. With that shift, the festival has faced criticisms from a variety of fronts. For hoteliers, the uncertainty around its dates has made it hard for the hospitality industry to capitalize on the free music concert. For academics, the vision of the festival seems to have been subsumed by the political boons local government reap by providing free entertainment to a population that often times does not even realize there are daylong forums in the IVEC that precede the nights of open air concerts (Rinaudo 2010). Cultural promoters also have felt the shift as their roles in the festival have been downsized. The fact that the staff at IVEC had to plan for an event they could only hope would transpire speaks to the ways in which finances have negatively impacted cultural events. In the beginning, finances could booster the revitalization of events, as it did with Carnival; now, there is a worry that funds or the lack thereof could have an outsized influence on what parts of popular culture remain viable, regardless of how popular they are among jarocho.

Because IVEC is protected by law, leadership staff is not worried that the institution is in danger of dissolution, but they are aware that to a certain extent individual projects are subject to the whims of the new administration taking over Veracruz,³³ as well as subject to the austerity that the state is facing due to the corruption and budgetary crises it has weathered. For that reason, the current staff has decided to house its new project on the local iteration of *son* music in the *Fonoteca Nacional*, the national sound archive. In blatantly protectionist terms, the staff informed the small group of us attending the project's release party that by putting jarochos' local patrimony in the national archive, it would be better preserved for posterity and to make it forever available to jarochos and researchers. By making this move, they have preemptively rescued their local patrimony for an imagined future where the original compositions may no longer exist, but the interest would remain. It is at once hopeful and disillusioned, pragmatic and—since the room was filled with the participating musicians—personal.

This year, there would not be a festival to *son tradicional veracruzano de raíz cubana*, but it was not the surprised cancellation of the Afrocaribeño. IVEC had been organizing festivals to the music that they describe as traditionally of Veracruz while acknowledging its Cuban root for a few years, though even earlier there had been different festivals that celebrated the same genre of music, more commonly known as *son*. Because of the changing of the guard, this release party would be the last event this iteration of IVEC would organizer. Doubled with the cancellation of the Afrocaribeño, the festival cycle has been broken, at least temporarily. The state has been either unwilling or unable to invest the funds required to sustain the event-based displays of the so-called third root, the official recognitions of the port city's blackness.

³³ Because IVEC is a government institution, the new administration always has the right to change staff. The fact that this is the first time the PRI will not be in charge in 80 years has only heightened the uncertainty.

Although state-generated *rescate* is subject to the vagaries of politics and budget balancing, the dedication to revitalizing jarocho culture—and in consequence a localized blackness—is already a shared investment among various practitioners and enthusiasts of quintessentially jarocho culture.

The Plazuela: A Character Study

Blanca inclined her head in acknowledgement, her fingers relaxed around the cigarette she held angled away from her face. Her tattooed eyebrows rose and fell in that knowing way as she smiled and made eye contact with the conga player who had just acknowledged her and her husband from the stage. The couple are regulars in the Plazuela, though they do not come the four nights a week required to have perfect attendance. When they do come, there is little doubt as to where to sit. A small index card with their name written in blue highlighter and taped to the corner of the square plastic table is the closest to a Reserved sign you will see in the small open-air plaza. Reserved seating is not a practice in the Plazuela, unless you count the purses, scarves, and other personal items people leave behind to mark their territory as they dance. But those small moments of blind trust read more like “occupied” than “reserved.” The conga player and other musicians in the son group who have access to a microphone—often engage with audience between numbers, both acknowledging regulars and soliciting theoretical tourists to identify themselves by cheers when their hometown or state is called. With the iconic four stroke roll on the timbales, the son group announced that their next song would be a *danzón*. Blanca put out her cigarette, her husband extended his hand, and the two left their belongings on the table and danced a short distance away from it. When the chorus began to sing, I corrected my original

assessment. It was a danzonete, not a danzón. If Blanca's husband has taught me anything, it is that.

In a recent municipal development plan, the Plazuela was one of three public spaces in the historic center that local government identified as part of their tourism development strategy, a top priority for their administration.³⁴ Specifically, the plan pledged to promote danzón, son, and “folklore”, which is to say son jarocho, in the identified areas. Years later, it appears that for them, promotion—at least in the Plazuela—consists merely in listing the weekly events on calendar of cultural events accessible to locals and tourists alike. Many Plazuela-goers argue that this level of state engagement is not enough. The chronic disrepair of the Plazuela is the subject of regulars' constant complaints. While the benches did receive the same white paint of all the city benches and the Secretary of the Environment and Natural Resources did install the same large trash bins they have placed throughout the city, discontented persons nevertheless have ample examples of the low priority placed on improving the Plazuela, development plan or not.³⁵ They cite the growing number of graffiti tags on the back wall, the broken tiles in the dance area, and the semi-permanent indigent community as proof that the Plazuela is an abandoned site—abandoned to the locals who love the Afro-Antillean music and dancing that takes place there. The overall effect makes the site a tourist's curiosity, one far removed from the concerted municipal efforts identifiable elsewhere. In this way, at least, those who love the Plazuela argue that it is in need of its own *rescate*, though the implication is that what it needs most is a renovation, not a revitalization. For locals, the Plazuela is very much so alive. It is a space where

³⁴ <http://www.invedem.gob.mx/files/2014/02/ifm-pmd-veracruz-11-13.pdf>

³⁵ Since conducting the research supporting this dissertation, the city has in fact painted the back wall and installed more light fixtures in the public space.

enthusiasts can reliably enjoy—and demonstrably invest in—what they now refer to as their Afro-Caribbean characteristics, their fun-loving reputation, and their “African root” in a non-cynical or overly performative way. In other words, the Plazuela is not a space created or maintained with tourists in mind. With that said, they do not mind the presence of tourists—especially if they can dance.

To understand the Plazuela, it is best to first set the scene. Before the hum of anticipation and the hum of the speakers’ feedback, you will hear the clanking of the aluminum door unrolling to cover the entrance to the tackling store in the back of the Plazuela. They as well as the print shop close up well before people start descending on the public square. At dusk—that time between the slowness of daytime and the movement of night—you hear the classic sounds of Veracruz: the *cling cling cling* of the pedicart vendor selling his *nieve de coco*, the strains of whatever scene the University of Veracruz’s ballet folkloric group is practicing that day, the impatience of commuters going down the main drag of *Independencia*, the sound of the rollerbladers passing through. Tuesdays and Thursdays the same *danzón* number plays on repeat for an hour while beginners learn their choreography followed by two hours of perhaps the same *four* *danzones* as the advanced group practices for their upcoming presentation or competition. Thursdays through Sundays the sound of heavy chains sliding to the ground and lightweight plastic tables being placed along diagonals will greet you as the sun dips lower and the heat of the day cools off. Even before the rhythm section steps onto the stage, the small square has its own cadence.

Once the people come and the music starts, the informal economy of the space takes off. The two restaurants that anchor the space primarily make their profits from selling drinks, so there is little competition between them and the snack vendors that weave between the tables. A

favorite among regulars is Rita, the tamalera who will add salsa to your *tamales de masa* or *de elote* with a small colored spoon and then return by and by to take your trash away. Her husband stands to the side, watching over the tub of tamales and briefly speaking with her as she replenishes her shoulder bag. At the end of the night—as they have done for over seven years—they hail a taxi and head home to one of the neighborhoods on the outskirts of downtown. There are at least two cheese vendors—a young man with sleepy eyes and enough hair product to defy gravity and a middle-aged man who is already inculcating his young daughter in the business. Depending on the day, there are up to three different peanut vendors whose eyes you can try to catch to get a plate of overpriced nuts or seeds. Young men with their eyes trained low scan quickly to see if anyone has shoes in need of a good buffing. They as well as the young men selling cigarettes and candy in tiered wooden boxes perched on their shoulders are a common sight throughout the historic center. On occasion you will see a vendor selling shawls, but such vendors tend to focus on the *zócalo* where the tourists are more abundant. Sometimes in the Plazuela the *nieve* man comes, selling his ice cream-like dessert without the need of the *güero güera* call that you hear in the famed *callejón* of *neverias* that connects the *zócalo* to the *malecón*. The metal on metal clang rings out truer and louder anyway.

The locals who come on a regular basis sustain this informal economy. Blanca and her husband may have a reserved table in writing, but for many others, the constancy of attendance makes for *de facto* reservations. It is a standing engagement. The authority of the space, Don Miguel, has a small letter board inside his beverage counter. Aside from the masking tape blocking out the lettering for the Wednesday program that never caught on, the lineup for the week never changes and is rarely consulted. Everyone knows the schedule and make their plans accordingly. Whatever slight variations there may be are either passed through word of mouth or

announced from the stage. The times when the state decides to use the Plazuela to create synergy for a festival such as the one to son tradicional veracruzano, the state-sponsored calendar may come in handy. Otherwise, it remains the lowest effort possible for the state to promote and support the space.

However, despite the concerted efforts of the musicians to encourage attendees to support the local economy both formal and otherwise, many people come to the Plazuela because it is a free, reliable form of entertainment. As Carla, one neophyte to the space told me, *lo mejor es lo gratis* and *lo gratis se disfruta más*. The best is what's free, and what's free is more enjoyable. Carla, who has what is considered a good job, works in the port like her family has done for generations. On the weeks when there are lots of ships, she can work double shifts (up to fifteen hours a day) and make between 2300 and 2500 pesos inventorying the merchandise that will then make its way across the republic.³⁶ When there are no boats, she does not get paid at all. Her dance partner also worked in the port, though his higher salary and unionized position protected him from the feast or famine lifestyle Carla manages. His economic security, however, did not translate to largesse on date night. Rather than pay the ten peso a seat cover charge and the fifty-peso drink minimum per table that Don Miguel demands, he escorted Carla to the free public bench before sauntering down the callejón, past Don Miguel's drink bar, to the chain corner store for *Caribe* wine coolers. In the end, it is possible he saved a few pesos, but only just. Perhaps it was the principle of the thing. Why take away from the enjoyment of a slow drag with your date by paying for it? After all, "free" is more enjoyable.

The musicians vocally challenge this tendency to enjoy the Plazuela without giving back to the space and instead encourage an ethos of *cooperación*. Periodically the musicians will

³⁶ For context, the daily minimum wage for general labor in Mexico was raised to 73.04 pesos in January 2016.

remind everyone present that what they are enjoying is free and that they receive no financial support from the government. The evening events—listed as *veladas* on the only official government support they do receive—are made possible by the audience’s “cooperation.” This cooperation can take many forms, from buying a seat and a drink, to purchasing a sonero group’s CD for 100 pesos, to passing money to the güiro player when he scrapes the ridged instrument in your direction. The musicians do not ask for a “donation” or a “payment;” merely your cooperation. Of course, the word cooperation suggests a mildness that is not always accurate. One group has taken to singing a slow, sing-song ditty that effectively says, “Please cooperate; don’t play the fool,”³⁷ as the guiro player and saxophonist methodically go up and down both sides of the plaza. Effectively calling out those who might pretend that they do not know why the instrument is pointed in their direction, it is funny, but a little intimidating as well. Another group solicits a *cooperación* from every man who dances. I have yet to see someone effectively get out of paying it. While *cooperación* is a common way that people ask for money, in this situation the word choice speaks to a broader sense of purpose to patrons’ leisure. *Cooperar* brings with it the understanding that they are all working toward the same end; that they are all in this together. But what exactly is “this”?

The musicians in the danzonera *Manicero* can successfully demand *cooperación* because they have been doing so for years. Moreover, no one is getting rich from charging each gentleman 25 pesos in return for three hours of danzón. The practice began years ago when the danzonera would play in the Parque Zamora for the “gente de la ranchería”, the common folk from the ranches who would come into town on Sundays to do business and stay into the evening for the simple pleasure of dancing. The cover was used to pay the band, because unlike the

³⁷ If memory serves, it goes: “Cooperen por favor. No le hagan al pendejo.”

Municipal Band, they received no financial support from the government. After they traded in the kiosk of Parque Zamora for the stage of the Plazuela, their loyal fans and the tradition of *cooperación* followed. Although they have been a constant force in the port city for years, they continue to receive no financial support from the government, though the city pays both the Municipal Band and the danzonera Alma de Veracruz to play the same genre of music in the zócalo. The difference, however, is that there is a tourist angle for the four nights of danzón in the main plaza. There, the upward mobility danzón has undergone is on display as people dress up and groups of danzoneros perform the steps and choreography they learned in their workshops.³⁸ The crowd in the Plazuela for the most part, continues to draw from the “clase medio-baja”, lower middle class, which is the social class that first adopted this Afro-Cuban ballroom dance when it made its way to Mexico.

This split between the zócalo and the Plazuela is important for the tourism angle, but also for the ways in which both sites represent how jarochos have carved out spaces to continue traditions they feel as theirs. Even though the zócalo has an eye turned to the tourists, the practice of dancing danzón in the zócalo did not start for their entertainment and predates the boom the genre experienced after the iconic 1991 movie *Danzón*. The danzonero Eutiquio Madrigal recounts in the documentary *Danzonero*, that 1982 people did not come the zócalo to dance until the dancer Sigfrido Alcántara began to dance there. Interviews with Alcántara’s children recount how he would dance with his wife, just the two of them in front of city hall for the sheer joy of it. For Madrigal this is key to the history of danzón in Veracruz, “Porque gracias a él, aquí estamos los danzoneros todavía. Gracias a él y a nadie más.”³⁹ One would wonder what

³⁸ The importance of workshop culture is discussed in the following chapter.

³⁹ It is thanks to him that we danzón dancers are still here. Thanks to him, and to no one else.

Alcántara would think now. Four nights out of the week couples dance for the love it. They may smile for the tourists, but they dance for themselves. From the lone couple dancing below the arches of the municipal palace to the lower-class people contributing to the livelihood of the musicians, the revitalization of the danzón was accomplished through non-cynical, individualized efforts. The state may have harnessed the energy for their own ends, but the heart is in the enjoyment jarocho feel for the music. As more than one danzonero has boasted, danzón, though it came from Cuba is dead there; it is only for show. Here, it is alive.

A similar story belongs to the Plazuela. The physical place is both old and new. It is made in the negative space between buildings representing nearly every century of Veracruz's existence. The unplanned nature gives it a polyhedral shape with sides of irregular lengths. The municipal government has supported the space in waves, adding a fountain and the stage that is still there. Beautiful trees were once planted, the old guard recall. But one administration undid the renovations of a predecessor. Trees were uprooted, and the lovely fountain dismantled, though its drainage remains an obstacle for the dancing people in the open space. The stage is still there, and the bell that predates the son music, the bohemian nights, the youths and the prostitutes. Its date reads 1892, but old pictures of the Plazuela—and the fact that it's on a 20th century stage—prove that has not always been where it currently stands. Nevertheless, while the bell has not always been there, according to the sign tiled to the wall, it had given the place its name at least as far back as 1850.

As a social space and gathering place, it is around seventeen years old. The founders of the Plazuela are still there, though there is little fanfare around them. That is reserved for Don Miguel whose beverage counter used to sell bulk coffee beans when the project first began. Not that it was a project. As Oscar, one of the closest things to a founder, tells it, his group of middle-

aged friends were forced to relocate from the café La Merced and saw the Plazuela as a place they could occupy. It had recently been contested territory between prostitutes and youths, and ultimately taken from both. Oscar and his group of friends filled the void. Oscar, like so many people of his generation, held a multitude of jobs in his long lifetime, including a stint in the port proper, but he was also an amateur musician. Eventually the friend group's long chats of coffee added a bohemian night with Oscar and others bringing in their instruments to sing and play for themselves. According to one in the old crew, it all went downhill when the first friend brought a female companion. No longer a boy's night out, the space became increasingly co-ed and eventually dancing music was introduced. Don Miguel is critical to this story because he was the business that helped transform this from a lark among friends into a space, but the creation of the Plazuela was not a savvy business plan, but rather an organic development. The *rescate* of the place was happenstance. The revitalization of the space can be traced to key figures but no overarching strategy. What if Don Miguel had not been willing to help this group of exiled friends? What if Oscar did not have a talent for music and a desire to start bohemian nights? What if so-and-so had not "ruined" it by bringing a girl?

Nowadays there is more intentionality behind efforts of *rescate*. Musicians and patrons are cooperating to maintain the music and public dancing that has become so enmeshed in the jarocho identity. Intentionality has brought with it an explicit discussion of blackness, one that naturalizes the discourse of blackness with each iteration. Among jaraneros in the son jarocho tradition, the third root concept is widely taught and repeated. Every jaranero knows that the genre is a result of the encounter between indigenous, African, and European populations. It is repeated almost by rote. In danzón classes and festivals, the Afro-Cuban origin is highlighted. Among soneros, the naturalistic narrative of carrying the rhythm in the (black) blood finds

purchase. Because all three of these genres feel the need to actively revitalize themselves, the subtext of blackness has become text. However, even as blackness is more firmly folded into the narrative, one finds that with intentionality comes anxiety.

Son jarocho, the folkloric genre that began its *rescate* in the 1970s is the success story. From the brink of extinction, it has become a world music and the second most popular Mexican genre after mariachi. In its recuperation, things, of course have changed. As we will see in chapter four, the workshop system has supplanted the fandango as the method of transference, though didactic fandangos do exist. From the outside, the popularity of son jarocho makes its *rescate* something to be envied, though those within the community can point to the fissures created by its revival and the claims to expertise that followed.

A similar situation has occurred in the danzón. Also subject to the workshop system, many danzoneros know exact details about the genre and can quote—and are quoted in—academic books about the performance-complex. For the most part, these are not the same people who pay their 25 pesos and dance for three hours with *Manicero*. While it is tempting to use social class as the distinguishing factor, it is more accurately found in the body. Those who are workshop trained have a more disciplined posture, a more exacting step. The older couples in the Plazuela sometimes do not look like they are dancing the same dance at all. It is not that one is more authentic than the other, but the contrast of the two types of danzoneros shows how *rescate* can ossify just as it revitalizes. Enthusiasts do not believe that danzón will die but are worried that younger people do not practice it with the same verve as the older generations. The comfort they have is that the musicians will always be there. At the very least the government has a vested interest in paying for musicians to play danzón. There is worry that the dance may

not survive, but little concern. The opposite is true for *son tradicional veracruzano de raiz cubana*—the dancers may not go anywhere, but the music might.

There is a reason IVEC created its catalog of *son veracruzano* and were so concerned about its preservation. There is a generational crisis slowly unfolding for *son* and most people know it. While many of the current bandleaders and musicians learned at the knee of a family member, their own children are either not invested in the music or too young to continue the tradition. Yet few people speak about it. *Son veracruzano* does not have a workshop system—dancing to *son* is considered to be the body's natural reaction to the music that calls it. For context, *son* is the predecessor of salsa; and while people do go to salsa classes, no such classes exist for *son veracruzano*. Moreover, the real worry rests with the musicians themselves. Will there always be musicians to support the dancing of *son*? In *son jarocho*, the practitioners are the musicians, even the dancers are musicians as the stomping serves as the percussion. In *danzón*, any group with the right instrumentation can play the most famous *danzones*. Besides, it is widely venerated in Cuba and practiced throughout Mexico. *Son veracruzano* has no such widespread popularity. Even though *son veracruzano* and *son cubano* barely differ, it is a truly local genre that does not reach the national popularity enjoyed by *son jarocho* or *danzón*. Yet the vibrancy of the Plazuela, the little notecard with blue highlighter, and the scattered personal belongings suggest that a *rescate* is not in order. At least not yet. How do you revitalize something so full of life? As I argued in chapter one. It is in the blood. And it supports lifeways.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRACTICING BLACKNESS

“It is precisely this notion of the prestige of the person who performs the ordered, authorized, tested action *vis-à-vis* the imitating individual that contains all the social element. The imitative action which follows contains the psychological element and the biological element. But the whole, the ensemble, is conditioned by the three elements indissolubly mixed together.”
--Marcel Mauss, “Techniques of the Body”

“[...] all of the strategies of art are [in music]. All of the intricacy, all of the discipline. All the work that must go into improvisation so that it appears that you’ve never touched it. [...] The major things black art has to have are these: it must have the ability to use found objects, the appearance of using found things, and it must look effortless. It must look cool and easy. If it makes you sweat, you haven’t done the work.”
--Toni Morrison to Paul Gilroy, “Living memory: a meeting with Toni Morrison”

In 1993 piece, “What Is This ‘Black’ in Black Popular Culture?” Stuart Hall outlines how the popular is perceived as simultaneously authentic and appropriable. The “popular” implies a rootedness to the communities for whence it originates by “allowing us to see [popular forms] as expressive of a particular subordinate social life that resists its being constantly made over as low and outside” (108). At the same time, it is “the space of homogenization where stereotyping and the formulaic mercilessly process the material and experiences it draws into its web, where control over narratives and representations passes into the hands of the established cultural bureaucracies, sometimes without a murmur” (108). In the jarocho example, this tension manifests in how that which was Afro-Indigenous becomes the resources for the “popular soul” of the newly stereotyped jarocho, at the same time the unique African trait of the region could not be elided. It persisted even as the “cosmic race” idea worked to consolidate the Spanish and Indigenous roots as the primary, and only noteworthy, contributions to Mexico and its people. To specifically relate to Black popular culture, Hall argues that despite the flattening of forms in the expropriation to generic popular culture, “we continue to see, in the figures and the repertoires

on which popular culture draws, the experiences that stand behind them”, thus allowing “other traditions of representation” which he briefly sketches as *style*; the deconstruction of writing in favor of the “deep structure of their cultural life in music;” and how the body is used, making oneself a “canvas of representation” (109).

Despite the appropriations Hall identifies, he ultimately argues that the concept of a “black popular culture” signifies the black community by “marking a difference inside of popular culture” (110). However, the absence of such a community in Veracruz begs the question of what, then, does a popular culture that is identifiably “Black” represent in Veracruz, Mexico? As useful as Hall’s schematic is to think with, the jarocho example, as always, continues to trouble the wholesale application of theory. But as Stuart Hall also said, “Theory is always a detour on the way to something more important” (1997, 42).

Whereas previous chapter worked to outline the jarocho stereotype and contextualize the contemporary way in which jarochos sincerely approach their Blackness in order to authenticate their jarocho-ness, this chapter focuses on the jarocho publics in which the work of practicing local culture instantiates Veracruz’s blackness. To reiterate, I contend that members of jarocho publics are working toward being more jarocho rather than acting Black. In making this claim, I am working with the anthropologist John Jackson Jr.’s distinction between racial sincerity and racial authenticity (2005). Jackson argues that sincerity rather than authenticity ought to be one’s analytical lens because of its subject-to-subject orientation rather than a subject-to-object model. He argues, “Questions of sincerity imply social interlocutors who presume one another’s humanity, interiority, and subjectivity” (17).

By pivoting to sincerity instead of authenticity, I argue that despite the essentialization involved in grasping blackness through stereotypes, the usefulness of blackness is not an instance

of jarochos “playing Black” (cf. Deloria 1998) or engineering a tenuous connection to a broader diasporic community (cf. Sansone 2003). Neither is it exactly as French sociologist Christian Rinaudo argues an “elective Africanness,” though the electiveness to signal blackness is a key trait to the current moment. Rinaudo, however, succumbs to a racial authenticity mindset, which is noticeable by the ethnographic material he uses to support his claim. For instance, he focuses on a son montuno musician who he describes as having “let grow his hair and chosen to play electric guitars from prestigious American brands, with the objective to appear each time more like Jimi Hendrix, Lenny Kravitz, or Ben Harper, multiplying, in that way, the references to Black culture in the United States” (2003, 151-2). However, in my own conversations with this same musician, I observed that the references he most readily grasps when reflecting on his perceptions of blackness are local, not international; familial, not star struck. Considering the sincerity of a man highlighting the blackness of his genre of choice—which I most note has undergone a decided localized renaming—instead of the authenticity of his haircut or instrument brand reveals the particularities of how the jarochos have embraced the third root rhetoric as their own.

Following Jackson’s theorization of authenticity and sincerity, I contend that instead of the authenticating moves of the alternate interpretations, the unsettled quality of blackness aligns more readily with racial sincerity, which Jackson describes as “wallowing in unfalsifiability, ephemerality, partiality, and social vulnerability” (2005, 18). This contrasts with racial authenticity, which Jackson argues renders individuals as “somatic extensions of social scripts, embodiments of predetermined dialogue, little more than flesh-and-blood racial objects” (18). Such scripts, which is a concept he borrows from Kwame Anthony Appiah (1994), are the narratives that help to shape one’s perception of self and others. As Appiah argues, collective

identities “provide what we might call scripts: narratives that people can use in shaping their life plans and in telling their life stories” (160). The danger, Appiah warns, is when these modes of behavior ascribed to collective identities curtail the autonomy of the individual identity. He also warns against projects of authenticity that “[speak] of the real self buried in there, the self one has to dig out and express” (155). Jackson further critiques how authenticity presumes an unbalanced subject-to-object relationship between the subjective seer and the objectified seen. It is, for example, how a change in one’s hairstyle can be read as a yearning to be more like Jimi Hendrix. The seer in this scenario not only relies on “racial scripts,” he also takes a “racial materialist” approach to adjudicate and authenticate the content of the seen (Jackson 2005).

Racial materialism, which is the reliance on phenotype and genes to assign race, is yet another instance of racial authenticity in that the seen is objectified and measured against an imagined standard. In the performance of identity as difference, the racial materialism of darker skin or certain grades of hair can at times be sufficient to make the claim. This is not the case in Veracruz. As discussed in chapter one, the materialist perspective of race as color and phenotype (Sue 2013) is in constant negotiation with the idea that the third root is both heritage and hereditary. When dwelling in this tension, one feels the way in which the idea of the third root, while agreed to exist, is still being worked on and processed. The ongoing edits and the ability to “performatively ad-lib” blackness move away from the strictures of racial authenticity and into the “liveness” of racial sincerity. Not only is the racialized target constantly in flux and without consensus, the potentiality of the Black ancestor—and the Black descendant—in Veracruz enables this flexibility.

The lack of a stable script, however, does not imply the lack of want for such a script. As we will see in this chapter, the workshop structure for learning popular culture at times is also a

workshopping of blackness itself. One can see the collaborative work in trying to thingify blackness so as to better identify and learn it. Stereotypes, which are authenticating scripts, of both Black people and jarocho abound in this process. However, it must be said that confronting stereotypes of Black people that are mostly positive when your home country cannot decide whether or not Black lives matter, was not wholly unwelcomed. The presumption of musical and dance talents, joy, and sensuality are a much lighter cross to bear than the assumption of one's inherent criminality. Regardless, the presumption at all remains an objectifying move that flirts with essentialization. However, according to Stuart Hall, the essentializing moment is “weak because it naturalizes and dehistoricizes difference, mistaking what is historical and cultural for what is natural, biological, and genetic” (1993, 11).

The curious thing about the essentialisms occurring in Veracruz is that they consider Blackness to be historical and cultural while using it to naturalize, biologize, and make genetic a regional identity—jarocho—that they perform as unique through the valorization of the historical and cultural blackness. Recall the *pringa* discussed in chapter one. Ultimately, it is not a racial authenticity that is the heart of the issue, but a regional one. The de-racination of the jarocho from its Afro-Indigenous origin continues to persist even as the African root is being propagated as that which makes jarocho unique in the nation. The “re-blackening” of the jarocho stereotype has not disturbed the regionality of the term. Instead, to use Jackson's words, what we see in Veracruz is authenticity's attempt to domesticate sincerity. Jarocho authenticate a de-racinated persona through a sincere attempt to process and make use of an Afro-Caribbean heritage and culture. This chapter analyzes the workshop setting as a scenario in which this process is taking place.

To understand how the idea of Veracruz's Afro-Caribbeanness has evolved into a social fact, one must consider the robust workshop structure that is bolstering and revitalizing local popular culture. As interest in local popular culture increases, more jarocho are enrolling in *talleres*, or workshops, to learn how to play and dance the folkloric music called son jarocho and how to dance the adopted Afro-Cuban ballroom dance complex (Madrid and Moore 2013) known as the danzón. Not quite hegemonic, the workshop or class structure has become the method of choice for learning these typical danceable genres in the port city—with the notable exception being son veracruzano, a local adaptation of son cubano which is only beginning to develop workshops—and at that ones that exclusively focus on the music rather than the music and dance as an integrated whole.

While the organic transfer of knowledge from parent to child continues in both of these genres, the *taller*, or workshop, is increasingly becoming the primary way to learn what was once passed down in convivial spaces like the fandango or the social dance, respectively. And though these convivial spaces still exist in their own right, the workshop structure has bled into these spaces as well. There is now such a thing as a didactic fandango where students are encouraged to attend or showcase their repertoire prior to the beginning of the “real” fandango. The danzón analogue to this is the ways in which classes and danzonero groups use the social dances as a space to both practice dancing in general and dancing choreography in particular in front of an audience.

The robustness of this system has not only supplemented the incomes of those who can claim a level of expertise, it has also worked to revitalize both genres and create new social networks among practitioners. For around three hundred pesos a month,¹ you can take classes

¹ During fieldwork this was on average \$19.77.

twice a week to learn your tradition in an untraditional way. In the son jarocho community there is a large cross-generational range in the student population, from young adults whose parents bring them to and from class, to old, retired persons, some of whom uneasily combine the hubris of old age with the humility of a beginner. The danzón workshops, in contrast, skew toward women or sentimental partners and have a smaller range in ages, with the younger dancers being highly lauded for their interest in “old people’s dance.”

Each instructor has his own style, which both allows for students to find which way of learning works best for them while also generating a sense of loyalty toward a particular *maestro*. Moreover, the loyalty is not only to the instructor, but to your peer group as well. While structured like a class, much of the *talleres*—particularly in the son jarocho community—are small social groups that socialize as much as focus on the task at hand. Fellow workshop-goers are the keystones in new spaces and the sharers of bawdy messages on social media messenger groups. They are usually nodes through which word of mouth information about the genre and beyond are shared. They are the places where rumors are mongered and secrets kept. They are also, I argue, the places where the third root rhetoric has found some of its most fertile soil.

Authenticity is a rampant concern among practitioners of folk genres. They construct and police boundaries between what is traditional versus for show, what is from the pueblo versus *fantasia*, what is local versus an importation. There is also an idea that involving yourself in these workshops can help you learn to be more yourself; you can be more jarocho by following more of the script. This is partly why older beginners characterize their involvement as a dream fulfilled and younger practitioners—especially in the danzón community—are congratulated on their interest. It is also why this very African-American ethnographer can be called “more jarocho than La Bamba” without referring to the color of her skin or the kink in her hair.

Nevertheless, the ongoing dialogue about the African ancestry in Veracruz and the workshop culture are coeval, with the latter doing a large part in disseminating the information developed by the former. While academics like Antonio García de León (2002, 2006, 2011) and Yolanda Juárez Hernández (2006), have worked to research and educate the public through books, articles, and public forums on the ways in which an Afro-Caribbean heritage is at the root of what it means to be jarocho, narrativization and retelling of this information in the more intimate workshop setting circulate the idea of a Black past in an ambiguously Black present. Moreover, the corporeality and embodiedness of these workshops on danceable genres of music foster a different relationship to the transmitted information than that developed from a seat in a forum's audience. Put plainly, the lessons learned in class go beyond chord progressions and choreography. And while the some of the information shared is not entirely faithful to the scholarship, such a scenario nevertheless transmits a taken-for-grantedness to the idea of African ancestry being integral to popular culture as it currently exists and is practiced.

I contend that the workshop structure highlights the tension between innateness and mastery that objectifies Blackness such that practitioners of folkloric culture believe that aspects of the jarocho—that is to say aspects of themselves—can both be identified as deriving from an African heritage and be learned. If as Fidel believes, they all have a *pringa* of black blood, the workshop helps one tune and attune to that thing that is always already happening in that drop. Through a focus on what is learned and developed in talleres dedicated to son jarocho and the danzón, this chapter explores how practitioners learn about a Blackness that is considered to be simultaneously discrete and integral, learnable and internalized. Through treating the workshop as a scenario in which the jarocho figure is repeatedly performed (Taylor 2003) and sketching the workshop culture through the incidental mentions of the third root, I argue that ultimately the

structured learning has not only facilitated the *rescate*, or revitalization, of what is typical of—and unique to—the jarocho, it has also vitalized the social factness of a Black heritage and history.

Considering the workshop as a scenario allows us to trace how the social factness of blackness is established through repeated beats, at times marked and remarkable and at other times not. According to Diana Taylor, the scenario is “meaning-making paradigm” that not only “structures social environments, behaviors, and potential outcomes,” but also serves as a “portable framework” that through its cumulative repetitions “makes visible, yet again, what is already there: the ghosts, the images, the stereotypes” (2003, 28). In my reading of the workshop culture, I argue that the structured nature of the encounter with a history and heritage linked to the third root has made such a notion tangible and relatable not only to participants, but also to the broader population. While Taylor outlines various ways in which the scenario is a useful theoretical tool, I am most interested in two of her formulations: the way in which the scenario facilitates transmission of knowledge and the way it demands the researcher to situate herself in relation to it, thus acknowledging our presence in the act of transfer (31-2). “Not everyone comes to “culture” or modernity through writing,” Taylor reminds us (xviii). The workshop space represents such a coming to culture that not only decenters the written word but also heavily relies on performance, which Taylor consider to be crucial to the transmission of social knowledge, memory, and identity (2). Ultimately, this situation works to ground the third root rhetoric in the lived experience of jarochos while also maintain the hearsay, rumor-like quality to Blackness discussed in chapter one despite the depth of archival knowledge related to the third root in Veracruz as seen in chapter two.

The workshop culture creates an environment in which the social factness of a Black history and heritage butts against the current of thinking that works to render contemporary Black people as a social fiction belonging to an elsewhere. As jarochos work to reconcile these two trains of thought, Veracruz serves as an example of the “imagined racial sincerities that complicate such straightforwardly materialist and literal readings of racial identity” (Jackson 2005, 21). The following is a collection of scenes from within the workshop space where you can see these imagined racial sincerities in action. As such, the liveness of racial sincerity slips into and out of frame as participants work to authenticate their jarocho-ness. The remainder to the chapter tacks between two *talleres*—one for son jarocho enthusiasts called *jaraneros* and the other a beginners’ class for learning the danzón. By putting the two genres in conversation, this chapter works to demonstrate how each workshop culture creates similar scenarios as they sincerely reckon with their idea of Blackness on the path toward discipling two different ways to be more jarocho. In the end, it briefly outlines how the transmission of knowledge in relation to son veracruzano is working without the authenticating structure of the workshop.

I’ve Got Rhythm

The nine of us stood facing Pablo, our dance instructor, waiting for him to speak. We had been meeting twice a week on the stage of the Plazuela since the start of the New Year. Not quite a resolution, many of us nevertheless viewed this new foray into the danzón as a completion of a longtime goal. There was Luna, a widow who wanted a hobby—something—just for herself, though sometimes she brought the granddaughter she helps rear with her. There were Fran and Lino who were dating, though both had danced the danzón before many years ago. Flor, who was more nervous than eager, always had a hesitation in her step and a hunch in her shoulders

despite Pablo's insistence to holding a proper, elegant frame. Elena had found her way to the group through her friendship with Esme, a more advanced dancer who belonged to Pablo's competitive group. The *danzón* for Elena was a way out of her shell, out of her house, and onto the stage. Rounding out our community was Jorge who came to the beginner class to help Pablo and to serve as a floating dance partner. Like Pablo, he had been trained in ballet folklórico and had a ready smile and a wealth of patience for the beginning group. And then there was me, the anthropologist who wished she could figure out how the *danzón* fit into her overall project as quickly as she could pick up choreography.

Pablo patiently explained to the group that we need to learn how to count before we could dance the *danzón*. So, we were going to count aloud as a group. And later, clap. We were to clap to the downbeats that corresponded to the count of the basic steps we had already learned. As Pablo went to his boom box to cue up the *danzón* "Nereidas," Flor flashed a nervous smile around the semi-circle while some of the others also looked perplexed at the task at hand. Although we had ostensibly been dancing to this number as we learned the choreography, the exposure that counting and clapping represented was a different prospect. Of course, this is why Pablo decided to make us count aloud. Usually it was just him counting with his back to us so that we could mimic his movements. Maybe he heard the lateness of one too many steps and decided that prior to the basic steps, we needed the basics in rhythm.

After the roll of the timbal and the pickup notes that start the refrain, Pablo began to loudly count the bars: "Uno...dos...tres..." and so on until we got to the eighth bar. Hands in the air keeping track of the number, Pablo with a flourish encouraged us to start counting again to represent the second refrain. Most *danzones* in Veracruz have two refrains at the beginning in which the couple does not dance—though some groups dance through the second refrain. Pablo

prefers not to. Instead, we stand through the refrains until the second refrain's fifth bar. Once stepping away from your partner, you pause on the sixth bar, and then begin your entrance which takes two bars so that you are in a close hold by the eighth. This is never explained this way, of course. Instead, we learn this by watching Pablo who nods and raises his voice to indicate the moment when we need to stop fanning ourselves and make an entrance. In the counting exercise he again signals when the change comes. Most of us follow. When he moves on to silent counting, things fall apart.

Without Pablo's voice ringing out over the music, about half of the class could not identify when to open on the fifth bar of the repeated refrain. Since the entrance is of tantamount importance, we worked on this for several rewinds of the track until Pablo decides to move on to the clapping exercise. Once the melodies begin—there are three in total—Pablo switches up the counting pattern. Instead of counting the measures, he begins to count the rhythm of the steps: **Uno**, dos, tres, **Cuatro**, cinco, seis, **Siete**, ocho, nueve, **Diez**, once, (doce). The eleven, sometimes twelve, beats he counts cover four measures with the stressed beat being a quarter note and the other notes, eighth notes. In the dancing of this rhythm, there is a hesitation in your glide as you continuously step together in different figures. After the first melody, which is sixteen measures or four cycles of the dance counting, there is the second refrain followed by a slower melody that is twice as long as the first. This too is followed by a refrain before the montuno section that is quicker, with more movement and usually lasts forty measures. In our counting exercise, we never got to the montuno section. Pablo deemed it homework and we returned to dancing.

We were out of sync and the darting eyes around the circle made it clear that most of us at least knew it. This was pretty common when Nico our maestro wasn't playing with us. Without his loud and clear strumming on his jarana, it was easy for the hesitant playing on our parts to end as a cacophony. This was particularly true when we were playing the faster partner dances known as *sones de pareja*. Either some of us would speed up, letting the simplicity of the music fool us to going faster than our abilities. Most times, though, we would slow down at an uneven rate, thus creating a polyrhythm in the 6/8 count that had no business being there. No one was singing the verses either, so that did not offer any excuse for how quickly and completely we were going off beat.

This son, "El Zapateado," is a quicker number with essentially two notes. It shouldn't be hard to stay together with our eight-stringed instruments of different sizes. We were all playing the percussive accompaniment to the absent melodic instrument known as the *guitarra de son* or *requinto*. There were no parts to speak of and yet, every so often one of us would get lost in the back and forth between C and G in the piece that could go anywhere between two minutes to twenty minutes and beyond. When part of a performance, a son tends to last between five and eight minutes. Otherwise a son can last as long as people are willing to play and *zapatear*, or dance. On this occasion, no one was on the low wooden platform known as the *tarima* where men and women dance percussively. I wish I could say that having the driving beat of people dancing with heeled shoes studded with nails at the toe and heel would have helped, but sometimes the dancers make it worse instead of better.

There were maybe eight of us playing out in the garden where we met twice a week to practice. Half underneath the shed, half underneath the large coconut tree, we sat together in green plastic chairs with our bodies turned slightly toward Nico and our eyes on each other's left

hands to make sure we were in the same point in the C-G cycle of the song. Since I was concentrating on which of us to follow to help establish a more dominant beat, I hadn't kept track as people trickled in to join the group. As we were in the middle of a son, they would either join in or wait patiently until we stopped before going around the circle and greeting everyone individually with a handshake. In a fandango setting, "El Zapateado" usually is one of the longer sones, as it often serves as a background for the ten-line poetry known as *décimas* or as an opportunity for dancers to show off their dancing skills in pairs. On this day, the latecomers did not have to wait all that long to announce their introduction.

Nico eventually stopped us with a wave of his hand and a wide, silver-capped smile that didn't quite reach his eyes. Rather than shouting the "Una!" that usually announced the end of a son, he simply waved us off. No one was surprised. As he tuned one of the latecomer's instruments, Nico rhetorically asked us what went wrong. Julio, one of Nico's oldest students in both age and presence in the group, offered up his assessment that we were not playing forcefully enough, and we got lost. Missing from his statement was the fact that he was notoriously stubborn in the way old people are—Julio's age and experience gives him a confidence that is not strong enough to be the leading instrument in Nico's absence, but not humble enough to get on board when we by silent consensus of raised eyebrows and lifted shoulders decide to follow a dominant rhythm plucked out of the discordance. Nico confirmed this statement before picking up his jarana and eliciting a sound from his instrument with an ease and forcefulness that was missing from our combined jaranas minutes ago. When we started to drift, he would accent his playing once again to drive home where we were, pointing the head of his cedar instrument toward us to further emphasize his point.

That is how Nico likes to teach: by just doing it the right way with gusto. There is not sheet music, no counting, no metronome, just Nico leading us through the songs for three hours. While some of us did have books with lyrics and he did pause to let us write down notes about new verses or chord progressions in our own notebooks, the idea was essentially to follow Nico. When he wasn't there, things fell apart; the center could not hold.

Jarocho carry rhythm in their blood as the argument goes. The difficulties in accessing or maintaining that rhythm—a trait credited to the African heredity scattered throughout the population, and an Afro-Caribbean cultural heritage that is shared—has not decoupled rhythmic ability from the jarocho. It is this rhythm that made the Afro-Cuban genres of the *danzón* and son music “stick” in Veracruz, and not only stay, but flourish. It is also this rhythm that fosters the poetic spirit of son jarocho and the driving beat of the *zapateado*. The poets among them attribute the rhythm to the tide, incessant, and constant as it continues to make the city what it is even as its pull has diminished to a degree. Others attribute it to seasonality's rhythms be they the strong winds during the winter known as the *nortes* or the seasonality of crops still brought to market. Nowadays the festival cycle creates its own rhythm so that the cancellations create a stutter step in everyday life, an *engaño*, or trick, to use a term from the *danzón* community.

Despite this emphasis on an always-already innate rhythm that makes the danceable genres both domestic and domesticated natural to the jarocho, there is also the strong narrative about mastery, much of which is facilitated by the workshop culture. Practitioners are just as quick to acknowledge that son jarocho and the *danzón* are hard to pick up, primarily because of the rhythms involved in it. Practitioners, those who spend money and take the time to formally

learn the music invoke this difficulty constantly—and this is as true as with the jaraneros as with the danzoneros.

You've Got to be Carefully Taught

We had been practicing “Los Negritos” for a couple of weeks before the question came to head—what does “gurumbé” mean, anyway? The word—along with the phrase “de teque manequé chuchú mayambe”—appear in the chorus of the son which means we had been singing it several times over before we had this conversation. Because some of the sones are actually quite old, from time to time there are words that are not used in everyday conversation that elicit a similar type of question. Usually, Nico defers to Josué, a retired school principal and poet, or Manuel, a current school principal who is incidentally from the same neighboring town as Josué. Both of them were usually willing and able to offer some erudite explanation of what a word means or where it came from. Today, however, no one had the answer to this question. At least no one had a definitively one. After a quick internet search by Juana proved unfruitful, the group of us settled on the idea we had had at the beginning—it was an African word of unspecified meaning. It surely sounded “African,” and not knowing the exact meaning of the word did not compromise understanding the son. And anyway, everyone seemed satisfied with the explanation. Of course it was. We all knew son jarocho to be one of the most fruitful manifestations of the third root. And after all, the song was called “Los Negritos.”

Pablo called us together once again to have a chat. “Does anyone know the history of the danzón?” he asked. The more advanced deferred this lesson to the beginners, who were fairly confident in their response: It came from Cuba. This is true, but incomplete according to Pablo.

Asking Esme to fill in the blanks, she offers that the danzón came from Matanzas, Cuba, but it was an adaptation of the contradanse, which she believed came from Haiti. This was beginning of the narrative that Pablo wanted to make sure we all knew. The danzón, which evolved from the contradanza in Cuba, came from the contradanse that Haitian migrants had brought to Cuba. But the contradanse was itself a French dance that was an adaptation of the English country dance! Country dance. Contradanse. Contradanza. Danzón. It was not the first time I had heard this genealogical report; in fact, nearly every danzonero in the port city has this story in their repertoire. Pablo's impromptu lesson offered me an explanation as to why. Before we went back to dancing, Pablo insisted that we know this history, "in case a tourist asked." Although we were enthusiasts learning for our own personal edification, we had to be at the ready—willing and able to share the story connecting Veracruz, to Cuba, to Haiti, to France, and ultimately England. An answer I never got, though, was where the other side of the family tree would lead, for the distance between Mexican danzón and an English country dance is more than just an evolution in vocabulary.

I present here two different conversations in which uniquely American cultural forms—products of the transculturation that created a new cultural form from the interaction of the old—are atomized into disparate parts as if the African or the English (!) can be precipitated out of the cultural forms we have today. It is also a story about two different paths taken at a fork in the road wherein the danzoneros chose to follow the dance's evolution back through the European side and the jaraneros chose the path toward Africa. At this point, both narrative tracks are well-entrenched, with academics recording these narratives only for practitioners to take up academic texts to further authorize these stories.

The question becomes why? What is the usefulness of taking the chosen path in each case and what assumptions and values does each group's choice reveal about the story the genre now tells itself and others about itself? The danzonera community, which is primarily dancers, focus on the English side of their family tree partly for the prestige associated with Europeaness, but also because of a relative disinterest in the musical qualities of the dance complex they practice. As mentioned, the evolution from the English country dance to the danzón is not merely linguistic. The African *cinquillo* rhythm is fundamental to the danzón and the reason the dance is heralded as rhythmically complex. Moreover, this musical inclusion was not a cooptation by displaced Frenchmen in Matanzas, Cuba, but rather a development among Afro-Americans imitating Europeans dances. Danzoneros need to know the history of their practice in case a tourist asks, but how that history is told also reveals the practice's present. The Cuban origin of the dance complex is deemed sufficient mention of the genre's black roots.

Sufficient mention exists in the son jarocho community as well. Among jaraneros, blackness enjoys equal billing with the other roots of son jarocho but understanding remains nearly as shallow as it is among the danzoneros. While many academics and leaders of the community disseminate detailed knowledge, in the workshop space, this information becomes simplified, mentioned and little more than that.

Instead of Dance, They're Doing Choreography

It was March and by now we have been dancing a while with Pablo. We had since added the danzón "Cecilia" to our repertoire, and I had gotten decent enough to participate with and not just observe, the more advanced group who ran through four or five different pieces of choreography a session. But back in my beginners' group, Pablo had enough confidence in us to

add details to our dancing beyond the basics. By now we almost always opened on the fifth bar of the refrain without fail. Now and again he would yell “Face!” to remind us to discipline our faces as much as we did the rest of our bodies. Besides the odd tourist passing by, the idlers in the Plazuela proved to be an indifferent audience, but nevertheless we would school our faces to be an approachable smile as we made sure not to wave our fan too aggressively. In fact, Pablo had noticed the progress and invited us to come to join his performance group on Fridays in the zócalo where they met to dance publically but not performatively. It felt a little bit like being invited to sit at the cool kids’ table.

It was around this time that Pablo once again called us together as a group for a mini-lecture. “To dance *danzón*,” he intoned, “you must listen to the music. It tells you what to do.” At this lofty statement Flor glanced down at the printed piece of paper with Pablo’s choreography on it that she had grasped in her hand before training her eyes back on him. We had never danced without choreography. Up to this point, *he* was the one telling us what to do, not the music. A list of steps choreographed the beginners and advanced groups alike. In fact, I had gone with Flor around the corner to make the very same copy she now had in her hands from a book borrowed from Celia, Pablo’s dance partner. Knowing and learning the choreography was how we had spent our many Tuesdays and Thursdays together. All of a sudden, Pablo wanted us to dance freely. It did not go as well as he had anticipated. To this day, I cannot dance the *danzón* well unless I have a strong leader as a partner. But I can pick up choreography.

Juana suddenly paused in the middle of her zapateado to listen to Nico stomp the pattern on the tarima. They had been dancing together, practicing “El Conejo,” an old son that Nico wanted the group to perform for the upcoming Encuentro of Jaraneros in Tlacotalpan. Nico, having

announced that it was to be his last performance at the annual event, wanted to make sure his group did something worthwhile, as opposed to the popular sones like “La Bamba” or “Colas.” “El Conejo,” which is rarely performed,² suited Nico’s aims perfectly. It is also probably why Juana had been momentarily stumped with the new pattern Nico wanted her to perform at the end of the month. As soon as he was done, though, she stomped in her burnt orange suede shoes twice before affirming that she got it. With her outers skirt raised in her hands exposing her crochet-hemmed underskirt she proceeded to mimic Nico’s pattern perfectly. Satisfied, Nico got off of the tarima and returned to playing the jarana. He would not dance during “El Conejo” because it was a son de montón, meaning it is a women’s dance. Instead, the plan was for Juana to dance with Rosita, a gregarious young woman whose new job was forcing her to come later and later to class but had been in the group for much longer than Juana.

Earlier in the day Juana had performed with La Palmera, the workshop’s offshoot performance jaranero group, which is why she was dressed up. On a normal class day, she wore workout clothes instead of today’s outfit of a crochet-shouldered white linen top with the two-sided wrap skirt over her slip skirt. While this look was supposedly more traditional compared to the all-white ensemble of ballet folclórico, Juana had bought the outer skirt from a market stall dedicated to selling clothes from India.

Prior to joining the group, Juana’s performance attire consisted of the all-white regional jarocho costume with its usual accoutrements—a black apron, a hanging fan and hanging golden necklaces, a ribbon tied in a bow on her hair which is also adorned with flowers and an elaborate

² According to researchers Rubí C. Oseguera Rueda and Francisco García Ranz, El Conejo is not commonly played, earning a frequency rating of 1 at the lower end of the scale that ranged between a 5 (Is played with much frequency and everywhere) and a -1 (very regional or local, very little known and disappearing). “El repertorio tradicional de los sones jarochos de tarima”

hair comb, and a handkerchief tucked in the waistband. You see, she was trained in ballet folklórico, the stylized dancing to son jarocho music that my workshop members derisively referred to as “those in white” in distinction to those who learned the tradition along with the dance. When Rosita joined the class in the third hour, she donned her white zapateado shoes—a vestige of her own past in a ballet group—before learning with her feet the new steps Juana had just mastered. Both Juana and Rosita could be considered crossovers—opting to learning how to dance on the tarima in the traditional way as opposed to the choreographed display of the ballet folklórico.

The two distinct snapshots of choreography are best read through John Jackson’s focus on “liveness” to point to choreography’s uses and limits. Both Pablo in belatedly introducing the idea of listening to the music instead of the choreographed steps and Nico in relying on Juana’s formal training in order to quickly reorient her dancing to be more traditional are working within a framework of both liveness and sincerity. The inertness of the page Flor clutched in her hand or—at least according to the traditionalists—the stiffness of the stylized dancing in ballet folklórico suggest an authenticity orientation that is trying to ossify the lived experience of folkloric culture.

Both instructors are also attempting to imbue liveness into the repertoire that their students have at their disposal. Or rather, both instructors engage the archive and the repertoire. Diana Taylor (2003) contrasts the liveness of the repertoire to the inert archive. However, she also notes that they work in tandem. More than that, the archive in many ways allows the repertoire to remain alive. For example, the salvaging of son jarocho, its revitalization, created an archive of *sones* that are photocopied, sold, posted online, made into liner notes, etc., that are

integral to the *rescate* project. Think of the notes Nico and others allow us to take—notes that students in take home and use to practice. These pages of notes were once learned by immersion. Now they are made tangible by the written word just as they continue to be transmitted live. In Nico’s class, for example, only the most beginner of beginner reads the lyrics. Most others learn new lyrics by being the responder in the call and response interchange. You start to learn individual’s preferences by their go-to lyric on specific sones.

This feedback loop exists in the *danzón* as well, but to a different degree. The *danzón* experienced its boom in the 1990s, nearly two decades after *son jarocho* began its resurgence. In the twenty years since that boom, there has been a somewhat ad hoc pedagogy in place. For instance, while Pablo may have his notebook of choreography for his students, the terms he uses for certain moves may not be intelligible in other groups, even as the embodied movement is the same. The terms you use to describe moves held in common tell a story of your journey through groups just as your style of dance does.

Despite its role as a foil in the workshop culture, ballet folclórico has played an important role in the revitalization of both *son jarocho* and the *danzón*. Crossover practitioners like Juana and Rosita in the former tradition and Pablo and Jorge in the latter bind the two modes of learning and dancing. Like soccer among the United States’ middle class, many young people pass through ballet folclórico and are disciplined by it. The crossover practitioners insert this discipline into the workshop structure. According to original members of Pablo’s competitive group, for instance, their group was the first to exercise uniformity in competition—including their dress and choreography. Before Pablo’s group demonstrated the elegance of choreographed presentations, most *danzonero* groups presented couples dancing at the same time but with individual steps. While some groups continue this practice, the trend tends toward the disciplined

form of dancing for an audience. So while the workshop culture distinguishes itself from the ballet, partly through language of authenticity and partly through the importance placed on history, the boundaries are soft and malleable.

Gotta Dance!

Seeing something done well amplifies your ability to detect when it is not. For this reason, I do not mount the tarima unless under duress. I was under duress. The group had been invited by Manuel to perform at his middle school, and we had eagerly agreed. It was an easy decision—not only is Manuel one of the more affable and outgoing members of the group, the performance represented an opportunity to connect with young people and in turn help them connect with their culture. I had been eager to join, for ethnographic purposes, of course. I had replaced my jeans with a long, patterned skirt that had been informally dubbed my “fandango skirt” in deference to the tradition of women wearing skirts. I had even worn my wooden heeled boots—the only shoes that made a noise, even though I had no intention of mounting the tarima. After all, Juana was going too. She could do the dancing. I was content to play my jarana somewhere on the outskirts, preferably away from a microphone. That wish was not granted, but I did not mind overly much. I was actually pretty decent at playing the jarana after summers of coming to the workshop. The zapateado? Not so much.

Nevertheless, somehow, I was urged to join Juana for the son “La Guacamaya.” This son is one of the most ubiquitous sones; it was impossible for me to not know how to dance to it. It is a son de montón, which means the basic rhythm known as “café con pan”—which when said aloud mimics the rhythm and stressed beats—can get you through the whole song. I even knew that when the refrain begins to tell the imagined guacamaya to fly, that I should elegantly raise

and lower my arms, imitating a parrot in flight. I had even danced it in one or two classes. But being compelled to dance it in front of a large crowd of middle schoolers was not in my plans for the day. I knew how to dance “La Guacamaya” both in theory and in practice—but in performance? I would have much preferred to play the jarana that was now slung across my back and clutched in my right hand, one of the many outward signs displaying my discomfort, I’m sure.

Pablo invited me to join the advanced group for a performance at a local nursing home. I had been interacting with the group for several practices, and Pablo was always eager to help me with my ethnographic research. However, he was not inviting me to merely observe—he wanted me to dance. The timing of the event meant that the whole group would not be able to attend, and since I knew the choreography to the numbers they were going to perform, it was to be a mutually beneficial excursion. The snag in the plan was that whenever the group performs, they wear one of their customized outfits—Esme would often comment that she had a closet of dresses from *danzón*, not all of them flattering to her figure and coloring. But I had no such closet full of performance outfits. I had just barely gotten a white dress and shoes to look the part when I danced in the *zócalo* for special occasion events. Luckily the shoes would suffice, but I was still in need of a dress. Celia, Pablo’s dance partner, volunteered to lend me one of her performance dresses, a soft white number with a layer of chiffon over the backing and rosettes at the collar. It was not at all the emerald green, ruched dress with silver accents they had already decided to wear. To try to make this blend in, Pablo asked one or two people to switch to their white dress to make the two different dresses appear to be by design.

After quickly changing in the nursing home's bathroom, I somewhat looked the part before joining the group in what would be my first and only performance. We danced several numbers for our elderly audience before inviting several of them to dance with us. Despite the one or two curmudgeons in the audience, many of them looked transported back to a time when the *danzón* was danced in salons and on every street corner during Carnival. Due to their ages they predated both the workshop culture and the public dancing culture that now takes place in the *zócalo* and the *Plazuela*. Nevertheless, many of them gamely followed where they were led as we danced the *danzón* to Memo Salamanca's classic, "Lindo Veracruz."

The preceding ethnographic scenes are entry points to Diana Taylor's idea of a scenario as portable frameworks of transmission, using performance as a form of community service and one of information transmission. Whereas the nursing home scene relied heavily on nostalgia, the middle school scene assumed it would be introducing kids to a perspective on the music that is robust, but not quite as visible as the ballet folclórico image. Each group also invited their own audience members to join in the dancing. At the school, this involved the more extroverted students trying their hand at the *tarima* but was followed by teachers who surprised their students by knowing how to *zapatear*, though their technique suggested a ballet folclórico training behind their dancing feet. The *danzón* example, in contrast, involved group members selecting and cajoling members of the audience to dance with them to a song that is not technically written as a *danzón*, but nevertheless facilitates its dancing. The "not-quite, nevertheless" quality of the *danzón* echoes throughout the genre, especially when dealing with older people who have not learned the dance through the structured engagement of the workshop. Nostalgia can be authenticated up to a point.

I Could Have Danced All Night

A little girl and her mother were among the first people to re-enter the dancing space as the Pregoneros began the next son number of their three-hour set in the Plazuela. The three-year-old clung closely to her smiling mother as the latter started dancing with her child. Although at play, this was not a random movement of little arms and little legs for the sake of movement. The mother was leading her daughter to the rhythm that the girl would grow up hearing merely from happening to grow up in Veracruz. In that fleeting moment, it felt as if I were looking at the development of what may later be misrecognized as innateness. The little girl, only perhaps recently having mastered walking, was learning a new way of being the world. Or perhaps she was learning a new world in itself—a world where the clave rhythm really is the key and the repetition of a chord progression never feels repetitive. When I lost track of the pair in the crowd as people entered and exited the dance area, it occurred to me that she was inadvertently learning something else as well—the steps you take to and from the dance floor are just as important as the ones you take while on it.

The salsa dancers take up residence in the back of the Plazuela. Unlike the rest of the dancers, they are a young, self-contained bunch that never sit down or sit out a dance—unless the number is too slow. But more than by their youth or their indefatigability, I started to recognize them most by their hands. That is to say, they dance with their hands. I suppose an expert in performance and dance studies could point to their turn out, their posture, or the fact that they do elaborate pretzel-like twists and turns. But what I was always struck by were their hands. They position them. They dance all the way through their fingertips. It's a bend in the wrist, a splay of

the fingers, and a tension in the thumb. Sometimes I like to focus on them because they are not dancing son, and it has something to do with their hands. And by hands, I mean styling. Trying to distinguish between that crowd—the ones who dance with their hands—and those who do not, makes you take for granted that there is no one way to dance “son.” After all, the salseros were dancing to son music too, but they weren’t dancing the way the other people were. Son dancing is an unmarked dancing—outside of, of course, the primacy of the two and the four. Even the ill-defined has standards. Maybe the more unifying way to describe those not dancing salsa to son music are the ones standing close to the bandstand, certainly dancing with style but not necessarily with styling. I wonder where they learn that.

A young couple came into the well-lit studio one day, wanting to learn how to dance together the familiar yet unfamiliar steps of this “Afro-Cuban” style of salsa. Salsa itself is wildly popular in the greater Veracruz—Boca del Rio metropolitan area, as can be seen in the plethora of salsa dance classes offered and the International Salsa Festival formerly held in Boca del Rio. The owner-instructor (who was actually Peruvian) worked to distinguish his studio by focusing on an Afro-Cuban way of dancing instead of the more popular styles. You would think that its location in the back of the Plazuela would draw a large number of interested parties, but in the short time when my presence overlapped with its existence, there was never a large number of people filling the space where photographs and pictures of Afro-Cubans on white walls looked down on you as you danced to recordings of Cuban music. Most nights, these recordings would eventually be drowned out by the live music coming through the speakers a few feet away on the Plazuela’s stage. The dance studio has long been replaced by many other short-lived ventures, but I wonder still if the young couple ever debuted what they learned among the dancing bodies a few short

steps away in the Plazuela. That space, at least, does not seem to be going anywhere anytime soon, and while it's not formal training, there's still something to be said about learning on the dance floor.

The public dancing scene in the Mexican port city of Veracruz corroborates the stereotype that locals—known as jarochos—love to dance. For three nights in the zócalo and four nights in the Plazuela, they have the opportunity to do so. As discussed in the previous chapter, various factors and interested parties sustain this public dancing culture with actors ranging from the state to local businessmen to everyday people who enjoy dancing. On the one hand, there is a “if you build it, they will come” mentality; but there is also the ground up investment that shows they will come build it if you will not. That is in fact how the famous nights of danzón in the main plaza or zócalo began—by a man, Sigfrido Alcántara, deciding he felt like dancing to the live music in the zócalo with his wife. This was in the early 1980s before the boom in popularity that followed the release of the movie *Danzón* (1991) starring María Rojo. It is also how the fandango culture often associated with rural areas, began and continues in the port city—with people organizing themselves. However, public dancing is not the only way in which the intangible culture of Veracruz is made immediate and accessible. In fact, while the public dancing is the most visible for the tourists whose dollars stimulate the local economy, it is undergirded by the workshop culture. And the unvarying schedule of events is its own form of structure.

All three of the above snapshots occur in or around the public dance venue known as the Plazuela and represent an aspect of how the dancing culture around son music in Veracruz, Mexico, is learned. Whereas the mother and daughter scene demonstrate the ways in which many

people learn how to dance from their family members, the example with the salseros depicts how the particular style of dancing to son is mainly demonstrable by focusing on what it is not. The final scene of a short-lived dance studio beside a thriving public dancing culture highlights the way in which the latter venue outlasts and outperforms the more structured spaces of knowledge transferal. Taken together, they are representative of the ways in which embodied practice is transferred outside of the workshop structure that defines son jarocho and the danzón.

However, the lack of the workshop does not mean one cannot find the ways in which a racial sincerity is used to authenticate yet another way of being jarocho through the music and dance. For one, son veracruzano—which is now formally called Traditional Veracruzian Son of a Cuban Origin—has its own festival in which expertise is shared across trained academics, musicians, and locally respected aficionados. For another, by domesticating the Afro-Cuban genre through a focus on its locality, enthusiasts are again not being more Cuban, but rather more themselves. Son veracruzano is taking a different path despite the wistfulness with which concerned enthusiasts refer to the successes of the danzón and son jarocho. This path explains in part why the slow turn toward workshops is first focusing on the music instead of dance—the worries felt in the genre is not about the dancers, but rather the musicians. While many of the current sonero leaders learned from their fathers, they now lack a new generation waiting in the wings. This concern undergirds the Veracruz Institute of Culture’s archival efforts to record the remaining high profile sonero groups as they make live albums of the musicians playing standards by Veracruzian composers as well as arrangements proper to the groups themselves. This concern also explains why an irregularly scheduled night of son music in the Plazuela can become a successful fundraiser for a local sonero’s dialysis despite the threat—and its fulfilment—of heavy rain. It is why the death of a sonero becomes front page news in *Notiver*

and tweeted by IVEC. It is also why still living soneros are continuously honored with homages and onstage calls for recognition.

In short, the call for revitalization of the genre expresses a concern that the will to dance to son music will outlast the means to do so. Once, I asked my friend Josué about this possibility. We had met through our son jarocho workshop, but we had gotten to know each other through Thursday nights in the Plazuela when he, Julio, Nico, and others from class would continue the conviviality over drinks, live music, and boastful innuendo. As one of the informal originators of the Plazuela's nightlife, Josué knew many of the regulars representing the older generation even though he is in his late fifties. Maybe his age made him philosophical on the matter. One early morning at a friend's restaurant in our neighborhood, Josué reassured me:

Mira. No creo que la música vaya a desaparecer nunca. Va a encontrar siempre un rincón. Porque los chavos de hoy que están bailando salsa cuando se hagan viejos no van a poder bailar salsa y van a seguir bailando. Entonces se van nutriendo. Dices ahorita en la Plazuela bailan los viejos, bailan son. Siempre va a haber viejos. No van a ser los mismos; no van a ser los mismos...³

He was certain that the population of son dancers naturally regenerates through the aging process. As the slower one gets, the less able he or she is to dance the fast-paced rhythm of salsa; he or she settles into the more relaxed dance style of son. There will always be old people. Implicit in Josue's argument is that there will also always be an interest. That, too, is carried in the blood.

Shall We Dance?

Most people communicate nonverbally while dancing—a pointed gaze, a squeeze of the hand, a gentle nudge, a small step in a certain direction. I would have preferred that. But my dance

³ Look. I don't think the music will ever disappear. It will always find a corner. Because the young people of today who are dancing salsa, when they get old they are not going to be able to dance salsa, and are going to keep dancing. So it nourishes itself. You say that right now in the Plazuela the old people dance *son*. There will always be old people. They won't be the same ones, they won't be the same ones...

partner, El Caballo Viejo, was a talker and an occasional flirt. Eventually I found that asking him questions would derail the possibility of an off-color remark about my, well, color. So I began to essentially interview him as we danced until we both fell silent. It's how I learned about his mother-in-law's poor health and about his daughter's successes in life. It is also how I learned that he thought he could dance the *danzón*. I had to learn that way because his actual dancing suggested otherwise. Is it okay to say the man can't dance? The man can't dance. At least not the *danzón*.

I found myself making these judgement calls frequently with my dance partners. If they danced through the *descanso*—they couldn't dance. If they did not face the band during said *descanso*—they couldn't dance. If they stepped forward with their right foot they certainly couldn't dance. But neither could those who picked up their feet to dance. In the *danzón*, we glide. With only a few classes, I suddenly employ a royal we. More often than not, these uncharitable assessments happened when I danced with an older gentleman who assured me that he had been dancing the *danzón* longer than I had been alive. I had been overly disciplined. I had learned a technique of the body (Mauss 1973) that was hard to get rid of. As a result, I had limited the possibility of what the *danzón* is, was, and could be. The same could be said for understanding the African diaspora in Latin America. Prior to this ethnographic study, I had been overdisciplined to think of the African diaspora as the purview of Afro-Latin Americans. Working with a population that identified with their blackness rather than identifying as black expanded the horizon of where to look and how to account for the African contribution to the region.

With effort I learned to dance by following my partner's lead instead of by the rules I learned in class. To do otherwise would have been to maintain a specific way of dancing at the

expense of an undisciplined, yet alive way some locals danced. Was it authentic to the style as it has now been workshopped, standardized, and performed? Not quite. Is it sincere? I would argue so.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE COMING AGE OF THE AFRO-MEXICAN

“When blackness is appropriated to the exclusion of others, identity becomes political.”
--E. Patrick Johnson *Appropriating Blackness*

“According to your culture, history, and traditions, do you consider yourself Black, that is to say Afro-Mexican or Afro-descendant?”¹
-INEGI, 2015

The historic 2015 census count of Mexico’s population of African descent seemed to mark—or mock—the end of my extended period of field research for this dissertation project. After having resolved that the salient question was about blackness rather than Black people, Mexico for the first time since its independence from Spain enumerated persons of African descent. And while few people I spoke to knew or worried about this brave new world of quantifiable blackness, for me, it felt very much like a turning point. For someone who initially went to Mexico looking for black Mexicans, suddenly the formal recognition of Afro-Mexicans became a fraught endeavor to which I had ambivalent feelings. On the one hand, the formal recognition of a population whose presence dates back to at least the Conquest was an important step to addressing the discrimination felt by those populations. On the other, I wondered what such a formality would do to the fluid conception of blackness I was only beginning to understand in the port city of Veracruz. This final chapter gestures at this brave new world, this coming age of the Afro-Mexican.

On Counting

¹ “De acuerdo con su cultura, historia y tradiciones, ¿(NOMBRE) se considera negra(o), es decir, afromexicana(o) o afrodescendiente?” Although I translate this question using “you”, the actual question allows one to fill in the blank so that each person in the household can answer be captured. The informant (you) is not necessarily the person for whom data is collected.

I knew the brunette woman would approach me after the Q&A session based on her body language during the talk. She had a question that needed to be asked rather than performed, but in the small room her semi-private question was heard by others. She should not have been nervous. In the end, it was I who was put on the spot. She wanted to know if she counted as Afro-Mexican. Or better put, she wanted to know if I as an *afroamericana* could help her figure out if she, as socially white as she appeared, still qualified as an Afro-Mexican.

I had introduced her and her peers to the term Afro-Mexican during a talk at a local university. My friend Rolando, who taught there when he was not working at IVEC or performing with his renowned son jarocho group, had invited me to speak to his tourism students about my research. After giving a wide-ranging talk on blackness in the port city, I was eager to discuss the future of Afro-descendants in Veracruz.

Days before a different leader of the jaranero community had shared with his thousands of followers on social media a poster announcing the upcoming midterm census. The social media post he had boosted consisted of a poster with the accompanying text: “If you recognize yourself, you count! Help us spread [the word].” It went on to explain that the attached poster was part of the steps taken by federal institutions leading up to the pilot test for the question to be included in the Encuesta Intercensal 2015 that would identify the population of Afro-Mexicans. According to the *Methodological and Conceptual Synthesis for the 2015 Mid-Census Survey*, the advertised pilot test, which was administered in locations with an historical Afro-Mexican presence, specifically wanted to assess two different formulations of the self-identification question posed to Afro-Mexicans.² Regardless of the wording, the activists were clear. The post ended, “Don’t forget that to demand recognition, you have to start with self-recognition. WE

² I have not been able to find the wording of these trial questions.

ARE BLACK! Please spread...” The jaranero who shared the post declined to add his commentary. Yet the fact that he took up the call to spread the word was a statement in itself. The campaign’s statement while clear with its emphatic text littered with all caps and exclamation points nevertheless remained ambiguous.

A 3x3 grid dominated the poster, creating a Brady Bunch-style blended family to be united under the newly official term, “Afro-Mexican.” The faces were varying shades of brown, varying facial features, and varying hair textures. They ranged from young to not-so-young and the alternating backgrounds of foliage and concrete could have been read as dismissing any sort of implicit argument for an urban–rural divide (J. A. Jones 2013). Upon closer inspection of those backgrounds, it seemed that these pictures may have been in clusters with some of the nine representative faces more than likely being neighbors. The photographed women and men, young and old, stare at the viewer with a range of expressions that could be described as happy, defiant, self-confident, and self-satisfied. Their features vary, and purposefully so, but the words below them cast as wide a net as the diversity of facial features. Those involved in the longer battle for official recognition may have found the image familiar. The photographs were cropped from a 4x3 image featured in the 2012 book *Afrodescendientes en México*.³

The words below the blended Afro-Mexican family made explicit whatever the images implied. Common regional labels were listed: negro, morena, mascogo, costeña, jarocho, all in a distinct typeset. It read, “We are all Afro-Mexicans. If you recognize yourself, you count!”⁴ In smaller font, the poster informed its readers that between the 7th and 18th of October, the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) would be visiting their residence to count

³ This book, which recently went through a second edition, was published by the governmental organization CONAPRED.

⁴ “Todos somos afromexicanos. Si te reconoces ¡Cuentas!”

them. The names of the sponsoring federal agencies stretched across the bottom of the poster: the Secretariat of the Interior (SEGOB) and its subsidiary CONAPRED, which is the National Council to Prevent Discrimination; the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP); CONACULTA, which is recently renamed the Secretariat of Culture; and the aforementioned INEGI. The poster made it seem so simple. It was anything but. In what was the viewer to recognize herself? In the pictures? In the older terms like *morena* or *masco*, or in the new term, “Afro-Mexican”?

In what is essentially a recruitment poster, the wide net cast by both the images and the words suggests that it does not matter through which avenue you recognize yourself, but only that you do so. *Negro* is a complicated term, both empty and full, that can be an insult, a description, or a term of endearment. In the Costa Chica region of Oaxaca and Guerrero, the term *moreno* specifically refers to the Afro-descendants of the region (Lewis 2012), but it is a generic and broad color category throughout the rest of the Republic. *Mascogos* are a small population in Coahuila descending from the maroons of the Carolina and Georgia colonies that would become Black Seminoles. Their name recognition is not high to begin with, so perhaps they are the simplest adherents of this if–then formulation. *Costeños* are generically anyone from the coast, though their stereotyping tends to include an exaggerated accent of aborted consonant closings and ghosted syllables. And then we come to the last word in the list: *jarocho*.

As argued in the previous chapters, that word is frustratingly fluid and endlessly referenced. In its broadest scope, it covers anyone from the state of Veracruz, though those from the southern portion of the state known as the *sotavento* make a proprietary claim to the label at the exclusion of the northerners. In the port city itself, some—mostly older citizens—recall the days it was a derogatory term and prefer the label *porteño* to signal that they are people from the port city. Younger people tend to not have this hesitation. However, as one acquaintance told me,

the true fault line between those who embrace jarocho identity and those who reject it is ignorance. To his mind, older people tend to eschew the term because they remember when it referred to those who removed the excrement from the streets. Those who willingly self-identify with the term do so from a lack of knowledge rather than as a way to rehabilitate the term. Regardless of one's self-recognition with the word, *jarocho* is universally recognizable even as its use is policed. Prior to that day's presentation, I had imagined many of the students would recognize themselves in the term jarocho, and perhaps in some of the other labels—*negro*, *morena*, *costeña*. But is that sufficient to come to the same conclusion presented in the poster?

From our discussion, I learned most of the students considered themselves to be jarochos. Despite its history as a caste term for Afro-indigenous peoples of southern Veracruz, it is now a regional term available to anyone born in the entire state. I doubted any of them had considered themselves belonging to the same family as the negros, morenos, or mascogos, unless of course it was in the broader Mexican family, no prefix needed. Certainly few of them would have been asked to pose for a picture to represent this Afro-Mexican blended family despite the range of phenotype on display. So then again, how were they to recognize themselves in order to count? In my talk, I posed this as an open question. The brunette woman with the scar on her cheek wanted me to close it.

She built her case. Beyond the fact that she was born and raised in Veracruz—which is a coastal city, so she's technically a *costeña* and a *jarocho*—her grandfather was Cuban. She did not clarify if this Cuban grandfather was Cuban as in from Cuba or Cuban as in dark-skinned. The term *cubano* can mean both in Veracruz. Assuming he was a Cuban from Cuba, that did not necessarily mean he was Afro-Cuban, though the association of *cubanidad* and blackness is tight in the port city. Regardless, this Cuban grandfather left such trace evidence on her countenance

that it need not be named. Until she was faced with this question, that is. Maybe it was like sugar in coffee, to use the metaphor offered by one Mexican anthropologist who also found her blackness through an encounter with Cuba. Maybe her inherited blackness had been a palpable sense up to this point; a mouthfeel of blackness. But now there was a name and a call to recognize herself in it. The campaign relies on self-recognition. Who am I to give her permission or absolution one way or the other?

She had listened carefully to my discussion on the various African roots in Veracruz, the place she had been born. I imagine the Afro-Caribbean rhetoric I highlighted was as familiar as the budding political campaign captured by the poster was new. She had witnessed my nascent attempts to grapple with the broader questions those two arguments generate. But more than that, she had read the declarative, “If you count yourself, you count”, and ultimately decided that I could help her make that decision. But in reality I was as curious as she with regards to what metrics one uses to count oneself. Is it in the brown faces with features that look like mine that were displayed in the recruitment poster? Or is it in the family stories, like the young woman’s who mentioned her dark-skinned Cuban grandfather as if he vouchsafed for her claiming Afro-Mexican as a light-skinned, Veracruzana? Perhaps it is in the cultural practices that jarochos have revitalized to make clear their Afro-Caribbean bona fides. Is it in the combination of both? Is either cultural practice or genetic ancestry necessary but not sufficient? In the newness of this label, what would justify someone’s self-identification or the identification of someone else as Afro-Mexican? Had this woman always already been this term I had just introduced to her?

Whereas the previous chapters have unpacked the unique significance of blackness in contemporary Veracruz, this chapter explores how Veracruz’s localized blackness could interact with the racial logic underlying the census question and count. As the Afro-Mexican population

defines itself, the reliance of self-recognition along familiar terms and labels like jarocho calls into question the very act of recognition. The jarochos of Veracruz offer a crucial case study to analyze as Mexicans continue to construct the Afro-Mexican as a recognized and recognizable part of their pluricultural society. The mid-census survey that the poster advertised is a turning point in the history of peoples of African descent in Mexico, but what is that direction and how does the jarocho example influence it?

Enumerated Afro-Mexicans

Over a year after the young woman asked if she counted and with much fanfare came the results of that advertised mid-census survey. In December of 2015 INEGI announced that 1.38 million Mexicans, representing 1.2% of the total population affirmatively answered the question, “According to your culture, history, and traditions, do you consider yourself black, that is to say Afro-Mexican or Afro-descendant?” It was the first time in the modern era that the Mexican government had officially recognized and counted its population of African descent. After Mexico fought for and gained independence from Spain, the new government abolished both slavery and the distinction of *castas* with the *Sentimientos de la Nación* (1813), a text written by José María Morelos, currently one of the most touted Afro-descendants in Mexican history. While this policy ostensibly intended that “all [people] would remain the same,” it in fact helped facilitate the erasure of Afro-descendants from the national imaginary. This erasure has had long-standing repercussions. As twentieth and twenty-first century activists and scholars have noted, the lack of a census question negatively affected the possibility for legal recognition and the ability to be the beneficiaries of public policy. This count was therefore an important step in an ongoing quest to correct the marginalization experienced by many of the communities and

individuals who consider themselves to be distinct within the ethnic fabric of Mexico that is generally considered to be “mestizo.”

Having the official count would be a way to reimagine the mestizo to include the afro-mestizos that have been present in the land now called Mexico since miscegenation first began in the colony. Within the colonial era’s hierarchical casta system that accounted for the various products of mixed ancestry that were increasing with every generation, the term mestizo applied to the offspring of an Indigenous and Spanish couple. In the 20th century after the Mexican Revolution, it became the label for the generic Mexican person. However, the colonial logic that emphasized those two ancestries remained the primary understanding of who the Mexican people are, leaving little room for the various other ancestries that have contributed to the Mexican populace. These other ancestries—while given cursory mention in philosopher and statesman José Vasconcelos’s foundational text *The Cosmic Race* (1925)—did not and do not factor into the conception of Mexicans as the children of the colonizer and the colonized. Even as the third root rhetoric worked to embrace and disseminate information about the African influence and presence in Mexico, the unmarked roots remained the Indigenous and the Spanish with the African having to be reinserted in the conversation. This assumption persists despite the fact that for as long as there have been people of European descent in Mexico, there have been those of African descent. Even while scholars increasingly move away from the third root phrasing due to the importance implied by the ordinal number, the presence and influence of Africans and their descendants in Mexico is not yet common knowledge. Hence the revelatory treatment given to the mid-census survey. It is not just that there are people of African descent in Mexico. There are 1.38 million people who identified themselves as such.

Much of the press—particularly in the United States—has assumed a self-evidentiary nature to conducting this mid-census survey. The *All Things Considered* program of NPR produced a five and half minute story entitled, “Now Counted by their Country, Afro-Mexicans Grab Unprecedented Spotlight.” *Quartz*, with one of the first comprehensive reports after INEGI released the preliminary findings in December 2015 wrote under the “Powers in Numbers” section: “Mexico has started counting its Afro-Mexican population.” Implied in both headlines is that the “Afro-Mexican population” that is “now counted” preexisted the actual count. Subtext becomes text in the *Fusion* article which proclaims “Mexico ‘discovers’ 1.4 million black Mexicans—they just had to ask”. Stephan Palmié (2013) thinking through Edmundo O’Gorman reminds us, a discovery rests on a presumption of existence whereas a find requires conceptual work before it is transformed into a discovery (13). The basis of this rests in O’Gorman’s argument regarding how Christopher Columbus’s “accidental finding” of the Americas required the invention of a corresponding fourth continent to render it intelligible and ultimately a discovery.

The trajectory from a find to a discovery via inventive reconceptualization does not fully map onto this scenario. Afro-Mexicans have always been a knowable, if not countable, reality in Mexico. Yet even if they were only ever discoverable rather than findable, the Afro-Mexican as a category still had to be invented. Previously existing labels like *jarocho* were recruited to the neologism just as surely as individuals were recruited to the category. Conceptual reworking of the Mexican population to (re-)include Afro-descendants happened via multi-sponsored publicity campaigns, the census itself, and media announcing the results. Yet a discovery never lands in one swoop. It unfolds. The young woman who looked at a poster and then to me to confirm whether she counted found out through my presentation that she already possessed many of the

official criteria— “culture, history, and traditions” and even an unofficial one—ancestry. Does that mean she discovered she was Afro-Mexican? Not quite. There was conceptual reworking that she and many others would have to do going forward. As Mara Loveman (2014) succinctly put it, “censuses are not mirrors of demographic realities; they do not merely reflect existing lines of distinction within a given point in time” (8). Mexico did not simply discover an Afro-Mexican population and then count them. They had to first create them.

While Afro-descended people have lived, thrived, and died in Mexico for nearly five centuries, the making of a population as such, one that is enumerable and able to be bestowed rights is an example of what Ian Hacking calls “making up people” (Hacking, *Making Up People* 1986). As Hacking argues, new categories of people are often not just reflections of social change, but rather the reaction of new ways for people to be (161). He argues for a “dynamic nominalism” meaning that the category and the categorized are coevally produced. In *The Social Construction of What?* (1999), Hacking further argues that “ways of classifying human beings interact with the human beings who are classified” (31). This interaction is called a “looping effect” in which people of a certain kind change in response to their classification, what they believe themselves to be, and how their classification affects their treatment. In this age of the Afro-Mexican, the mid-census survey is but one call with an uncertain response. While over a million people affirmatively responded, that number will certainly change. The understanding of the question—which has not been and cannot be captured numerically—will change as well. To ask if someone is *negro*, a color label, and then immediately reconceive of it as a political category “Afro-Mexican” presents as a demographic question at first blush, but it is really a theoretical one.

Recalibrating Social Race

Fifty years ago, American anthropologist Charles Wagley (1968 [1957]) theorized that social race in the Americas fell along regional lines and tended to favor ancestry, physical appearance, or sociocultural status. If social race is a weighted system, who counts as what becomes a question of calibration. Mexico's new campaign to count its overlooked Afro-descended population, then, represents a recalibration. Originally, colonial societies assumed these three criteria would map onto each other despite the almost immediate intermixing between populations. However, miscegenation increasingly muddied the distinctions between European, Amerindian, and African persons, and the systems became too complex and unsustainable prior to their simplification in the 19th century. If the nationalism of the 19th century prompted concrete reckonings of social race, the 20th and 21st centuries' multiculturalisms have shifted the determining factors.

According to Wagley, different regions calibrated the three factors differently, reflecting "the relations between people of diverse biological and cultural origin within a larger society" (158). The United States, for example, is the only society that focused on ancestry. The Caribbean and Brazil primarily determined social race by physical appearance with a decidedly anti-black preference. Countries with large indigenous populations, specifically Guatemala and Mexico, concentrated on social and cultural status to such an extent that physical appearance and ancestry are almost nonconsequential. Wagley based his theory on tripartite racial systems comprised of indigenous, mestizo or ladino, and white populations. He did not attend to the populations of African descent and their place in majority-indigenous societies. With this oversight, he argues that physical appearance is not salient because it is difficult to distinguish between an indigenous person and a mestizo. Instead, one relies on social and cultural criteria

like language, custom, dress, community membership, and self-identification to make the distinction. These characteristics are not immutable. The boundaries are porous enough for an indigenous person to pass into the mestizo population even in places where the importance of ancestry creates a binary between indigenous and non-indigenous persons.

This porosity is a feature not a defect. As historian Alan Knight has argued, “[T]he process of mestizaje, sometimes seen as basically racial, is in fact social; “mestizo” is an achieved as well as ascribed status” (Knight 1990, 73). Just as the biological basis of mestizaje began in the colonial period, so did the social aspect. In the 18th century, class had already trumped the racial division messily represented by the *casta* system when determining social identification. In fact, contemporary readings of the *casta* paintings (cf. Carrera 2003; Katzew 2004) attend to the social more than the somatic when analyzing said works of art. Knight argues that during the 19th century the collective acculturation of indigenous persons was “an integral part of the long process of Mexican ‘development’” (73). In the following century, social status continued to matter in the effort to “slice up the broad Indian–mestizo continuum” into a neat dichotomy. While the criteria for this bifurcation varied, they were always socially rather than racially determined (74). Knight dismisses the claim that self-identification was of utmost importance because the social construction of the indigenous–non-indigenous dichotomy was controlled by the latter group. This has been the case from the colonial period, through independence and revolution, and into the 20th and 21st centuries. As such, the focus on social status to determine social race persists. However, it does not adequately direct what is to be done for Mexicans whose African ancestry creates marked differences in their physical appearance.

Cultural differentiation offers no solution either. The unmarked Mexican identity has always already included the people of African descent and their contributions to society. As

mentioned in chapter two, the Our Third Root Movement of the late 1980s and 1990s heralded this fact. Even as there are dialects and customs associated with Afro-Mexico, Afro-descended persons have been popularly absorbed in the non-indigenous side of the dichotomy. In many ways, this erases the relationships between indigenous and Afro-descended Mexicans. Keep in mind, the jarocho was originally an Afro-indigenous type. When elevated to a broader regional type, the jarocho maintained and valorized its constitutive blackness while minimizing the indigenous (Pérez Monfort 2007). So while indigenous populations continue to be the marked category in Mexico—people more readily reference the discrimination and racism directed at indigenous persons than Afro-descended ones—the fact that Afro-Mexicans remain socially and culturally unmarked, directs us toward other criteria to determine their social race.

If Afro-Mexicans are not socioculturally distinct, are Wagley's other criteria more suitable in determining one as socially Afro-Mexican? The emphasis on ancestry may have defined social race in the United States, but ancestry plays a role in other countries in the Americas. Take one avenue available to the young woman asking if she should self-recognize as Afro-Mexican: her Cuban grandfather. Does this woman's (Afro-)Cuban grandfather demand that she recognize herself as "Afro"? Traditionally this would not be the case. In Veracruz, despite the low frequency of people identifying themselves as black, there is also an ease in which people identify their ancestors as Black. Rather than known ancestry, however, many claims rely on assumed ancestry. Recall some of the characters we met in chapter 1. Ramón whose features are not strong, nevertheless identifies his father as being more Black. Verónica's children through her generation-skipping theory of blackness would certainly apply even if her folk understanding of ancestry is closer to Spanish *limpieza de sangre* than the US system. The

historian in Yanga who argued the African ancestral past has mixed out of contemporary Yangueros would have to reconsider the point.

However in our reconsiderations, how much are we transplanting contemporary criteria into past contexts? While some members of the Peregrino family with their famous aunt Toña La Negra and father, El Negro Peregrino, identify themselves as Afro-descendant but not Black, they believe their grandfather who was “2 meters tall” would not have been able to split such a hair. Like body composition and skin color, hair has become evidence of an ancestor’s blackness. My own kinky hair has more than once given someone opportunity to speak of an ancestor who was “Black” even if it has also compelled them to touch my hair or hug me without my permission. Yet the retroactive assignment of (social) racial categories already sneaks in contemporary criteria into historical situations. For instance, when an acquaintance showed me a picture of his father to prove to me that he “had the blood”, I asked him if his father considered himself to be Black. In response, he demanded that I look at the picture again instead of considering his father’s previous self-identification. In the PBS documentary *Black in Latin America*, Mexican anthropologist Sagrario Cruz-Carretero recounts an anecdote in which she asked her father why he did not tell her they were Black upon returning from an enlightening trip to Cuba (Gates 2011). He replied that they were not Black, but rather *moreno*. Cruz then translates this as being Black, despite his very clear use of a different term.

Individual anecdotes aside, ancestry plays a role in the new census, influencing if not social race, then political race. While counting Afro-Mexicans was the headline-grabbing change on the mid-census survey, the Mexican government also added a new question to capture those who consider themselves to be indigenous. The 2010 census, in contrast, merely asked if those over the age of three spoke an indigenous language, if so, which ones, and whether they also

spoke Spanish. The 2015 mid-census survey included a question about indigeneity nearly identical to the question about Afro-descendancy. Whereas the latter question listed, “history, culture, and tradition” as criteria, the former asked: “According to your culture, do you consider yourself indigenous?” Both questions have four possible responses: “yes”, “no”, “does not know”, and “yes, in part.” “Does not know” applies to situations in which the respondent does not know how a household member would respond. According to their manual, census interviewers were to indicate “yes, in part” if the informant said something along the lines of: “could be because my father is, but my mother is not” or “I would say a little bit” (INEGI, Manual de Entrevistador 2015, 114). How does one reckon this partial identification, this claim to mixed ancestry as distinctive, reconcile with the entrenched idea of Mexico as a mestizo nation, as the cosmic race?

All told, the conjectured “Cuban” ancestor would recruit many inhabitants of the port city into the new category of the Afro-Mexican—those whose family trees bear immigrants from the sister island and those whose darker-skinned relatives are retroactively assigned a Cuban moniker based not on nationality, but on color. As Christina Sue (2013) has argued, it is necessary to reckon with color when analyzing the racial dynamics of Mexico and to analytically treat color as a subset of race (7). That it is color (which here stands in for a variety of phenotypic expressions including hair, body composition, and facial features), which drives antecedent racial identification already slips us into physical appearance as the defining criterion.

Despite the way in which color categories work as proxies for race, the situation in Mexico does not align with the ideal types Wagley identifies as indicative of places where physical appearance is the most important criteria for social race. Unlike Brazil and the Caribbean, Mexico does not have a wide range of intermediary terms for social race in popular

usage. In fact, the doubling of descriptors like “moreno-moreno” or the overly broad euphemism “gente de color” (people of color) does not compare to the long lists of color categories found in other countries (Schwarcz 2003; Telles 2014). However, this does not save Mexico from being a pigmentocracy (Telles 2014; Vargas 2015) in the sense that one’s skin color has a material effect on one’s life chances. In 2017 INEGI issued the Intergenerational Social Mobility Module (MMSI) which quantified the extent to which skin color affected opportunities by tracking intergenerational social mobility. It was the first time people were asked to answer a question related to their skin tone (Perlata, El INEGI reveló nuestra pigmentocracia 2017). As part of that study, participants self-selected the color best representing their skin tone using the color palette created by the Project on Ethnicity and Race in Latin America (PERLA). The palette consists of a range of colors with “A” representing the darkest option and “K” the lightest. Of the participants, the majority identified themselves in the F-H range, firmly in the “moreno” category, though the elasticity of *moreno* could conceivably include a wider range of colors. MMSI found that darker phenotypes had limited opportunities in life from education to employment (INEGI 2017). In effect, phenotype still has material effects in Mexico even if it was not a strong enough criterion to dictate social race.

What is more, the careful construction of the census question—to focus on “culture, history and traditions” discourages the conflation of phenotype with race. While the question does begin with the term *negro* before glossing it as Afro-Mexican or Afro-descendant, this *negro* is ethnic rather than racial. In the interviewer’s manual, INEGI clarifies that they use the term because “in many regions of the country, Afro-Mexican or Afro-descendant people identify in that way.” It goes on to explain that they are also identified as “negros mascogos, negros costeños o negros jarochos”, making black a modifying term for regional label. The explanation

explicitly states that neither skin tone nor hair texture imply one's belonging in the category and reiterates its use of history culture and traditions instead of phenotype. The paragraph concludes by reminding the taker to respect how individuals self-identify (INEGI, Manual de Entrevistador 2015, 114).⁵ While self-identification is now the standard, its pitfalls including the limited options set forth by the census itself, the ability for one respondent to represent an entire household, and the inability of census takers to indiscriminately ask and faithfully record an individual's answer (cf. Telles 2014). The ongoing recalibration of social race, the looping effect, must be included in this list.

Because this is the first time the government officially solicited this information, it is hard to detect how social race affected the results and in turn how the question might affect social race. Wagley's theory never considered Mexicans of African descent, which facilitated his emphasis on sociocultural difference as the distinguishing factor in Mexico. However, the other criteria are not currently sufficient either. Perhaps social race as theory should not be our primary concern at this juncture. Political race—or rather race as politics—has already begun to shift the tide in Veracruz.

A (Rhetorical) Shift

I was late for the inauguration of the 21st International Afro-Caribbean Festival in what must have been the only time an event started on time at IVEC. It was 2017 and things had evidently changed under new IVEC leadership. I somewhat uselessly turned on my recording

⁵ En la pregunta se utiliza el término “negra(o)”, ya que en muchas regiones del país, las personas afromexicanas o afrodescendientes se reconocen de esa manera. En algunos lugares se identifican también como negros mascogos, negros costeños o negros jarochos. Sin embargo, el ser afrodescendiente no implica un color de piel o textura del cabello determinados. Por tal razón, la pregunta antepone la historia, la cultura y las tradiciones como elemento de identificación y no el color de la piel. Es importante respetar la autoadscripción de las personas, es decir, tal como se reconocen a sí mismas.

device to catch the amplified soundwaves bouncing around the mid-18th century former convent. With that exercise in futility complete, I turned my attention to making impressionistic notes. My little notebook is filled with random details—the little girls in matching dresses bored out of their mind, the street noise, the cluster of media members around the loudspeaker in the back. The number of white Mexicans in the room. I admit, this was the first time I had made note of such a thing, but the fact that I had makes another note even more striking. One of the dignitaries mentioned, as was par for the course, “nuestra tercera raíz” however this time the context was different. She followed this all too common phrase with the pronoun “they”, a list of specific municipalities, and the census as a citation. The “our” for the “our third root” was no longer the shared culture but rather discrete populations belonging to the state. That “our” hit the ear wrong and it had nothing to do with the acoustics. A shift had already taken place.

May 23, 2017, state Representative Yazmín de los Angeles Copote Zapot submitted a decree initiative to add language to Article 5 of Veracruz’s Constitution. This article primarily addresses the pluricultural and multiethnic nature of the state via the rights and protections afforded to indigenous people. The proposed 8th paragraph would read: “It corresponds to the State to promote and protect the cultural and natural heritage of Afro-descendant communities located in the state, through the implementation of public policies.” As reasoning for this addition, the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) member cited a 2011 National Commission for the Development of Indigenous People study for the identification of Afro-descendant communities in Mexico; a 2010 National Survey about Discrimination in Mexico, the 2015 mid-census survey; and cultural characteristics like Carnival, the Afro-Caribbean Festival, son jarocho, dance, food, and town names like Mandinga, Matosa, or Mozomboia, which is to say items

typically associated with the third root. The term “third root” was not used at all. July 18, 2017, *El Universal* reported that Congress approved this measure (Ávila 2017).

A week later Representative Mariana Dunyaska García Rojas of the National Action Party (PAN) presented a draft decree to reform Article 5 of the State Constitution to “promote and protect the development of Afro-Mexican communities, promoting their languages, cultures, uses and customs, as well as their resources and specific forms of social organization”.⁶ As reasoning for this addition, she cited Guerrero and Oaxaca’s constitutional recognition of Afro-descendants; the fact that Veracruz was the port of entry; the statue to Gaspar Yanga; the culture (“art, culture, talent, gastronomy, identity, and the force of a vibrant race in Veracruz”); and international accords such as the UN’s International Decade for People of African Descent.

What do these consecutive, nearly identical reforms to Article 5 tell us about the shift brought about by the mid-census survey? You have two state representatives from two different parties making decrees that carry the air of grandstanding. The information cited is not new. The thirty-year old “our third root” language of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) days is abandoned, yet its referents are cited. The commission reports and studies are from the better half of a decade ago. The academic work is decades older as is the statue to Gaspar Yanga’s statue. The historical and archival record centuries old. Even the census, the impetus for these political maneuvers was over two years old at that point. Yet the coincidence reflects Loveman’s observation that rather than mirrors, censuses “are both stakes and instruments of politics.” The categories themselves are “political products” (2014, 8-9). In Guerrero and Oaxaca, the two other states to have constitutional protections of Afro-Mexicans, there is a robust grassroots political movement agitating for rights and recognition. In Veracruz, there is no such energy. Instead, you

⁶ <http://www.legisver.gob.mx/Inicio.php?p=sliderInfo&i=5559>

have PANistas and PRDistas standing in front of their colleagues, having newly discovered there are Afro-Mexicans—a new constituency to hail.⁷

An Academic Question

The five of us sat in an empty classroom behind the IVEC. My friend Raúl has organized this meeting between me and his bandmates. Earlier in the week when I had run into Raul and his chihuahua in the Plazuela, he suggested I talk to his band because what they were doing *was* the third root. Curious about what “doing the third root” looked and sounded like, I took down his bandleader’s name and contact information. As I sat in the palapa with the group, I rued how formal my text messages had been. No airs were to be found among them. My recording of our spiraling conversation is full of cross-talk, slang, and me failing to wrangle our conversation into a coherent narrative. I never did get an answer of what *doing* the third root meant, though Raúl did discover that he had no idea what the third root meant either. He thought the third root was simply contemporary fusion in general—they were a fusion band—but his friends clarified that mistake for me. Long after decimating the two liter Coca-Cola and cookies I had brought with me, I knew I needed to let them go about their life. But I wanted to ask one last question before we parted ways. The question was not my own. It was the census question.

Like everyone else I personally knew, they had not been sampled in 2015 and had therefore not heard the question. After repeating it several times, Raúl, who was halfway out the door, declared that to be an academic question—his way of saying it had little significance in their everyday lives. The others readily agreed. Even as I tried to unpack that response they

⁷ As of the December 26, 2017 version of the Veracruz State Constitution, the amendments proposed and approved to Article 5 have not been added. Changes proposed and approved to the Constitution that were made after July 2017, however, have been included.

approached it academically, trying to appease me with their answers. One said his dad was Black (negro). Another said the culture was Afro-Caribbean. A third said, it was possible. Raúl, who earlier emphatically denied being called jarocho because of its derogatory connotation, left us with an answer that was not an answer. “Let me tell you something,” he said, his voice taking on a defiant tinge as he removed his sunglasses to better make eye contact. “I feel closer to the tambor, than to this,” indicating the jarana he held in the crook of his arm. With that declaration—or confession—he made his exit. The implication that he felt closer to the drums, which is often metonymically *afro* than the folkloric instrument he carried on his back lingered.

Maybe my impromptu, unfocused focus group was right. Maybe it is an academic question right now. But whether Veracruz was Caribbean was once an academic question. Whether there was an African influence in son jarocho was once an academic question. The provenance of the *danzón*'s and son music's rhythms, too, was an academic question. If the story of blackness in Veracruz shows us anything, it is that academic questions do not stay academic for long. The jarocho publics prove as much through their insistence on facing life by making sure to revitalize that which is already happening in the *pringa* of Black blood they share. The localized blackness animates and is animated by the jarocho. It is no longer an academic question as to whether the culture, history, or traditions of the jarocho have something to do with Mexico's third root. Or if it is a question, the only answer is yes.

The group of musicians may have been able to skirt the question by branding it academic in 2017. But the 2020 census is on the horizon. And it is in fact not an academic question. It is a political one. Do you recognize yourself? If so, you count. What it means to recognize yourself and in what—that, to my mind, is an academic question worth pursuing.

CONCLUSION: VERACRUZ AND THE SHIFTING LANDSCAPE

“...ethnographic objects tend to behave in curious ways. Although they clearly are our constructions and not simply out there in the world, fieldsites, and even topically circumscribed ethnographic *problems*, lead double lives: places and problems change not merely because they change *in fact*—which, of course, they inevitably do. They also change because we come to them from historically no less changing epistemic vantage points.”

--Stephan Palmié, *The Cooking of History*

It was my first time walking through the callejón leading into the Plazuela since I had been back. The signs of the months passed were apparent in the ways only absence makes visible and indecipherable in the ways that seem proprietary to Veracruz. The pedestal of the street lamp in the middle of the walkway was no more broken, though its continued disrepair marked time in its own way. The piece of street art that depicted a runaway slave newspaper ad was all but gone with just a corner of it clinging to the wall as a reminder for those who had ever noticed it. The Alcoholics Anonymous meeting space had a new—but already peeling—coat of blue paint and a new litter of kittens underfoot. Logically I knew that the cockroaches skittering along the path must have been new ones, but the sight was familiar all the same. The most startling change was the filaments of roots that hung low enough to touch. The tree to which they belonged had long ago taken residence in the abandoned building to the left, but these roots were a new feature in an old space. As I gazed upon them, I wondered if living their growth would have made them less spectacular, more banal. I was drawn out of my musing by the siren song in the genre of *son* coming from the Plazuela. The music, of course, was the same. Only these roots, or rather the drama of their presence, truly drove home that I had left at all.

One of the more striking consequences of writing slowly while staying attached to your site is the way your site changes on you and you change on your site. There are material differences that would have probably affected my questions and my analyses. For instance, one of my main sites, the Plazuela is no longer in a state of disrepair. Trees have been pruned, the graffiti has been painted over, and floodlights have been installed. Of course, my assessment of its state was different from that of others' depending on their familiarity with the site over the years as well. The classes where I spent much of my time have changed in my absence. Our teacher Nico has moved on; the group has relocated; and the new maestro comes from the tradition of ambulatory jarocho performers. What kind of questions would this unlikely pairing created? The danzón group I frequented has also changed. Its membership has grown and its gender balance has become starker. How, for example, does this speak to bodily techniques and blackness given the ambivalent treatment of gendered and racialized body comportment in dance? One of the biggest changes, perhaps, has been to IVEC. As I mention earlier, the state-level administration change has led to a near total replacement of staff at the institute. These new employees have a different vision and a different level of expertise. From my observations, they also have a markedly different investment in the Afro-Caribbean culture of the port city.

In the interim, I have also gained perspective. I now realize my research was conducted at the interstice between two multiculturalist approaches. Mexico is shifting from what Sleeter and Grant (1999) called the 'four Fs' approach to multiculturalism—fairs, festivals, food, and folklore—to the more contemporary iteration, characterized by Mara Loveman (2014) as recognition, rights, and redress. My interlocutors did not know they were living this shift either. They were both the inheritors and beneficiaries of the former model, and—thirty years into this approach—were quite comfortable with thinking about blackness in these earlier terms.

Unbeknownst to them, the Age of the Afro-Mexican was just on the horizon, waiting to come to port. Or more precisely, it was to the West, coming not by sea, but by land.

This political moment has yet to arrive in Veracruz, though there is ample research to be conducted once it does. For the transition between the two is not complete, and these multiculturalist turns have afterlives among the people who take them up and use them for their own ends. You can also see the long shadow of the first multiculturalist turn in the census question itself. In asking about culture, heritage, and tradition, vestiges of the older model circumscribe the newer model—the Afro-Mexican. As I further this research, the ways in which this “academic question” becomes pragmatic will be of utmost importance. Too, would be the ways that those who identify as black engage or not with those who identify with blackness. Thus far, jarocho publics have developed their particular approach to blackness with little pushback beyond the occasional ethnographer proclaiming them to be in denial or deeming them to be “acting black.”

In this dissertation, I have argued neither of these things. Instead, I read the same phenomena that have engendered these assessments and come to a different conclusion. I have argued that the practice of *rescate* has restored an afrojarocho past, thereby presenting blackness, and making it available as a cultural resource in the future. *Rescate*, then, is the ultimate investment; it is a devotion of time and effort for an undertaking perceived to be worthwhile. This devotion exists primarily among what I have termed jarocho publics—those communities created around iconic local practices like son jarocho, the danzón, son montuno, and the IVEC calendar of events. Their members exert their time and effort primarily in repetitive activities that instantiate and presence blackness in the port city, activities that I have broadly glossed as “practicing.”

The practices are not new. In fact, it is their oldness that makes them culturally expedient (Yúdice 2004). They help foment the port city's "sense of place" as well as the sense that this chronotopic place called Veracruz is a site of Mexico's blackness despite the relatively small numbers of self-identifying Afro-Mexicans. Nearly a century ago, the Spanish traveler Juan Rejano remarked that one gets the impression that Veracruz was "the entrance to a country where mestizaje has been done not by the Indians, but by black people." While then his observation was due to the somatic expression of the people he encountered, one nevertheless gets a similar impression today. The difference, however, is that it is not the jarocho's somatic expression but rather the cultural expressions they claim and proclaim that makes this sentiment ring true. Thirty years after the Our Third Root program began, people have grown accustomed to an Afro-Caribbean narrative. Because I begin with this fact, my questions and conclusions differ from those ethnographers who have had the same ethnographic problem as I have—the role of *lo negro* among *los jarocho*.

The practice metaphor highlights the repetition and recitation that presence blackness. Such devotional practices create incremental change in the persons engaged in such an endeavor because practice constantly creates the foundation upon which it builds. For this reason, it is possible that my conclusions could have only occurred a generation removed from the Our Third Root program. Perhaps my interventions at the time of writing developed with the sea change embodied by the Afro-Mexican already on my mind. I am not certain of this, but I am certain of many things. For one, the denial of the black presence in the present and the emphasis on the past is not a denial of ancestry. Rather, it is a way to make blackness an always already quality that cannot be gainsaid due to somatic expression or the lack thereof. Imagining Cuba as a black space is not geographically distancing blackness when one considers how much work jarocho

publics invest in remembering the Cuban influence and justifying their continuing similitude. The performance of identifiable black popular culture be it music, style, or embellishment could perhaps be read as acting black, but only if one does not attend to the ways that blackness has been subsumed into jarocho identity. In many ways, Veracruz and its jarocho publics are a success story in the long battle toward recognition of the African contribution to Latin America. It is also a challenge to the assumption that the main ends of recognition is the adoption of identities for the state to recognize, enumerate, and service.

Mexico's "Our Third Root" program has fomented two different approaches to blackness. On the one hand, you have the situation in Veracruz in which the African presence is primarily a cultural resource and an acknowledged contribution to Mexican culture. On the other hand, the third root signifies an enumerable population of Afro-Mexicans. Although the nation is moving toward the latter approach, the former as developed in Veracruz is in many ways more revolutionary. While recognition will ideally change the material lives of Mexicans who have been marginalized and othered in their native land, the approach in Veracruz invites everyone to recognize that blackness is always already in the foundation of Mexico. Veracruz, then, shows an option in which blackness is projected both into the past and into the future rather than primarily embodied in present populations available to be captured by censal tools and used to justify the adoption or rejection of public policy.

It cannot be overlooked, of course, that this phenomenon has developed primarily in Veracruz, a place that in many ways was predisposed to localize and internalize narratives of blackness. Its long reputation of and association with blackness undoubtedly facilitated jarocho publics' easy acceptance of their black inheritance. At the same time, the response among

jarocho publics thus far goes against the assumption that recognition of the cultural contribution of Afro-descendants would result in the identification as an Afro-descendant. Instead, their *rescate* of blackness in the service of the jarocho, shows how cultural importance can be incorporated in older, more established collective identities rather than generative of new ones.

I began this conclusion with a juxtaposed image of tenacious roots, revitalization, and ruination. In Veracruz, Mexico, many old buildings are let and left to decay through abandonment. Strong trees—old in their own way—grow through long collapsed roofs, through windowless panes, through the very walls of buildings. Roots of enterprising trees occupying abandoned buildings paint a worthy portrait of how the city has “learned the art of growing old” (de Certeau 1984, 91). This art is not always aesthetically pleasing, but it is striking. With enough care, the abandoned can be repurposed, but without proper support, the repurposed runs the risk of being abandoned. This architectural landscape, this spatiotemporal zone has been the setting of this narrative. It has been a narrative of purposeful repurposing and tenacious roots.

I end this dissertation about the presencing of blackness fully aware that these jarocho publics—jaraneros, danzoneros, soneros, and the regulars to IVEC events—live in interesting times. The 500th anniversary of the city is within a year’s time and the 2020 census soon to follow. The narrative Veracruz tells itself about itself could change in its next half-millennium; it would not be the first time. The Age of the Afro-Mexican could lead to more jarochos counting themselves as Afro-Mexican or discounting their cultural ties as relevant criteria. But at least for a moment the revolutionary potential of the African diaspora exceeding both complete sublimation in national identity and marginalized existence occurred. It was not televised, but it was danced, played, and talked about. It was practiced and it had presence.

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