Programa de Estudios de Honor
Universidad de Puerto Rico
Recinto de Río Piedras

Honors Program
University of Puerto Rico
Rio Piedras Campus

TESIS O PROYECTO DE CREACIÓN

APROBADO COMO REQUISITO PARCIAL DEL
PROGRAMA DE ESTUDIOS DE HONOR

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21 de mayo de 2019
Fecha

(Re)Writing Racialized and Gendered Scripts: Contemporary Bomba Practices and Discourses in Puerto Rico

Honors Thesis

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Date of Defense: May 21st, 2019

Dedication

To Mami and Papi, whom made this project theirs. Thank you for unconditionally supporting me through this phase, even when you both were skeptical at times about if I was really in *bombazos* or researching in the library at night as I told you I was. ¡Los amo siempre!

Acknowledgments

Throughout the writing of this thesis I have received a great deal of support and assistance. I would first like to thank the Honors Program, currently directed by Dr. Eunice Pérez-Medina, for giving me the opportunity of developing this project. This experience will be invaluable as I continue my academic career. Moreover, I thank my mentor, Dr. Jorge L. Giovannetti, for guiding me through my research, alerting me of bomba activities where I could conduct fieldwork on, and for thinking and rethinking this project with me. I would like to acknowledge, also, my professor, Dr. Bárbara Abadía-Rexach for forming part of my committee, as well as for her academic work, which became fundamental for mine.

Additionally, I thank my mom and my dad for all their support throughout this project and throughout my bachelor's degree. Thank you for understanding that this research would not be conducted only in the library, but that it required me to go out and observe *bombazos* during day and night, in San Juan, Bayamón, Trujillo Alto, Hatillo, and so on.

I am genuinely grateful, too, with my great friend, Roberto Talavera, who was kind and patient enough to read and comment my work in more than one occasion. I thank him for motivating me to finish the project under the threat of ending our friendship if it was not defended. Furthermore, I am thankful to my significant other, Edan Hernández, who accompanied me to several events and who was never short of words of encouragement during the most frustrating moments of this process. Likewise, I want to acknowledge my friends, Aurimar Báez and Javier Negrón, for letting me vent with them throughout the year and three months that took me to finish this study.

Finally, I am grateful to the participants of BombAeróbicos, whom welcomed me to the group even though I was much more younger than them, and to the coordinators of the classes, whom allowed me to participate in them. To all of you, thank you.

Abstract

Bomba is an Afro-Puerto Rican performance tradition of music and dance originated by African slaves brought to the island around 1680. Throughout history, bomba has been circumscribed, along with blackness, to institutional, folklorized representations of primitivism and hypersexualization. Since the 1990's, there has been a palpable growth in the appearances of women-led groups within what has come to be popularly known as the New Puerto Rican Bomba Movement (NPRBM). This movement has been characterized for their efforts of making bomba part of the everydayness as they expand their realm of practices to organize creative expressions of bomba.

This research explores the ways in which the NPRBM groups incorporate government-sponsored racialized and gendered scripts. I argue that these groups are reproducing certain aspects of what is considered authentic bomba, as well as (re)writing them while they challenge and replicate essentialist notions of blackness and gender, and expand the dominant ideologies through performance. Specifically, I attend the role that the deployments of tradition through creative expressions play in this dialectic process. I do this mostly through ethnographic fieldwork of BombAeróbicos, one of bomba's contemporary creative expressions, as well as of other events that situate bomba at the center of their programs. This research expects to shed light on the constant (re)creation of racial understandings in the Caribbean, while bringing to the surface the agency of these groups as they challenge racial understandings through musical practice.

Keywords: cultural nationalism, bomba, racial scripts, gendered scripts, Puerto Rico

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(Re) Writing Racialized and Gender Scripts: Contemporary Bomba Practices and Discourses in Puerto Rico

-Aixa: ¿Dónde está Héctor?
- Daniel: Hoy trajimos al hermano Víctor para que toque. Héctor es muy blanco para tocar bomba
-Aixa: Pero, si Héctor es muy blanco, ¿qué tú eres?
-Víctor: Por lo blanquito que es Danny, solo lo dejamos bailarla [la bomba] y no tocarla.[1]

The dialogue presented above took place during a BombAeróbicos session that I attended as part of my ethnographic fieldwork for this project. Before starting the class, Aixa, an old "mulata"[2] women, approached Daniel, the young "colorao"[3] man instructor, about the whereabouts of Héctor. Héctor was a young "jabao"[4] man who used to play the drums in the fitness class and was absent that day. In his place was Víctor, a black man with dreadlocks that was getting the "primo"[5] ready so that the session could begin. Daniel, mischievously hiding a smirk, jokingly implied that Víctor had the right skin shade to play bomba, unlike Héctor, who was *too white*. Aixa caught the irony of the joke, pointing out Daniel's own whiteness. Víctor, joining the conversation about this racial phenotype, answered before Daniel could, teasing that Danny was too blanquito, which for locals, has two meanings. Blanquito not only connotes a lighter skin color; it is also a derogatory term used to refer to

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[1] -Aixa: Where is Héctor?
-Daniel: Today we brought our brother Víctor to play. Héctor is too white to be playing bomba.
-Aixa: But, if Héctor is too white, what are you?
-Víctor: Given that Danny is too "blanquito" [literally, little white, mostly used to convey elitism and high class], we only let him dance it [bomba] and not play it.

-Daniel: Today we brought our brother Víctor to play. Héctor is too white to be playing bomba.
-Aixa: But, if Héctor is too white, what are you?
-Víctor: Given that Danny is too "blanquito" [literally, little white, mostly used to convey elitism and high class], we only let him dance it [bomba] and not play it.

[2] Mulata/o refers to someone mixed race (Duany, 2005). See Jorge Duany's table of Major Folk Racial Terms Used in Puerto Rico for the approximate meaning of the terms (2005).
[3] In Puero Rico, colorao refers to a "redhead, reddish skin" person (Duany, 2005).
[4] Jabao could be a racial term equal to "high yellow" in the United States. In the Puerto Rican context, it refers to a fair skinned person with curly hair (Duany, 2005).
[5] The primo is one of the two types of drums used in bomba, specifically, the one that plays the dancer's piquetes.

someone that belongs to a higher social class (Duany, 2005). That Danny too blanquito meant that, due to his whiter phenotype and high social class status, he was only allowed to dance bomba and not play it. All three burst in laughter, letting the moment pass fairly fast and getting ready for the BombAeróbicos to start.

Introducing Bomba

Bomba is an Afro-Puerto Rican performance tradition of music and dance. Its origins can be traced back to the Spanish colonization period in Puerto Rico, when Africans who were brought as slaves created this cultural expression as a unifying language and as an act of release and enjoyment that allowed them to show their humanity in an indirect way. Even though bomba was constantly delegitimized, criminalized, and considered dirty and vulgar in the predominant discourse during the colonial era and early postcolonial years, it was institutionally incorporated into the national imaginary by the 1950s.

Consequently, it became an iconic folkloric component in the construction of Puertoricanness through narratives of "la gran familia puertorriqueña" or the great Puerto Rican family. Puerto Rico's sense of nation has ever since been anchored to the notion of racial democracy, whereby the State narrates Puerto Ricans as the product of the harmonious mixture of three races. The institutional construction of Puertoricanness as the result of the racial mix during the 1950's allowed for bomba to be considered a form of art (Godreau, 2015, p. 177; Abadía-Rexach, 2015, p. 91). The cultural expression was folklorized: that is, it was relegated to history with an accompanying sense of nostalgia and exoticism as it became situated as part of the country's past (Godreau, 2002). African "heritage" was therefore institutionally connected, and limited, to both slavery and music.

By giving bomba a very specific musical slot, this government-sponsored national discourse thus managed to limit the reach of African culture in the national imaginary of racial democracy. This has lead to the articulation of State ideologies of racial democracy,

which have inspired the imagery of the island being a paradise of racial and cultural homogeneity. Such discourse includes and celebrates blackness while at the same time pursues ideas of "blanqueamiento" (whiteness) and "mestizaje" (racial-mixing) (Godreau, 2002, p. 281). Consequently, the government has attempted to domesticate and co-opt representations of blackness, with bomba being probably the most evident case. Blackness was therefore articulated as something that inexorably referred to the body in motion and constructed dancing as an essence that came from a "distant" Afro-descendance. This notion delegated black women bodies to spaces of sensuality and hypersexualization that turned their bodies into alleged corporeal exuberance of eroticism with a certain fragility surrounding them (Godreau, 2003). As a result, gender and racial dominant narratives of bomba were produced, creating what Godreau denominates as *scripts*, or hegemonic narratives that determine what is recognized as black (2015, p. 14).

During the last decade, there has been a palpable growth in the use of bomba in everyday spaces led by bomba groups that noticeably differ from the once State-sponsored folkloric dances.[6] These groups have developed at the margins of the government's cultural scaffolding and operate as autonomous organizations. They thus have portrayed bomba as a cultural expression that ought to be practiced in the everyday life and that should be inclusive of all colors, since the activities they organize are accessible and popular among people from different racial phenotypes.

Bárbara Abadía-Rexach (2015) identifies these groups as the New Puerto Rican Bomba Movement (NPRBM) and alludes to organizations like Taller Tambuyé and Repicando Conciencia, among others, as representative collectives of the Movement. This is the case for Taller Tamboricua, a folkloric, female-led school founded in 1998 that has as its

[6] By state-sponsored folkloric dances, I refer to groups such as Los Hermanos Cepeda, and los Hermanos Ayala, which have become affiliated to the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture since 1970s.

main purpose the teaching of bomba in creative ways. The group offers learning options such as BabyBomba and BombAeróbicos that are designed for the enjoyment of diverse age groups. Taller Tamboricua has created a reputation of being one of the most active and innovative groups of the NPRBM As defined by Elia Cortés, the organizer of Taller Tamboricua and the creator of BombAeróbicos, this modality is a type of cardio exercise that uses "los pasos tradicionales de la bomba para promover la salud a todas las edades"[7] and is offered free of cost in different locations around the island (Barceló Jiménez, 2018).

Another one of the characteristics of this Movement that Abadía-Rexach (2015) highlights is its efforts of "cotidianizar la bomba" or making bomba part of the everydayness. One activity that appears to achieve this is BombAeróbicos, where participants of old age cardio-exercise at the rhythm of the "barriles"[8] in order to improve their physical health as well as become cultural practitioners. In BombAeróbicos, there is not a deployment of any official discourse related to race generally, or blackness in particular, or in its relation to bomba. Consequently, Taller Tamboricua and Medical System Card (MCS), the official BombAeróbicos sponsors, promote the classes as ways to enjoy "our culture" as one works out.

The BombAeróbicos stance, however, does not prevent participants from deploying their own understandings of bomba, which in many occasions are anchored in the State-sponsored scripts of race and gender. In most of Latin America, race talk, and especially race humor, unveil structural realities related to the State-sponsored ideologies of "blanqueamiento" or whitening and racial democracy. More specifically, in Puerto Rico, racial terminology tends to be "highly situational and intimately linked to context of usage" (Godreau 2008, p. 6) as a result of the prevalent color-blind ideologies. As Christina Sue &

[7] "The traditional bomba dance steps to promote health to all ages".
[8] Barril or barriles refer to a bomba drum or drums, indistinguishably of it being a primo or a buleador.

Tanya Golash-Boza (2013) argue, joking is one of the everyday situations where one can see the way in which dominant ideologies are reproduced, as well as contested. That becomes evident in situations like the dialogue cited in the epigraph, where colorism discourses are activated in order to delegate the roles in bomba. Thus, the casual joking by Daniel, Aixa and Víctor in BombAeróbicos reveal the dominant narratives of bomba as an intrinsically black performance. As Cindy García argues "laughter does not disguise social hierarchies as much as it makes them easier to bear" (2013, p.xxi).

Argument

In this thesis, I rely on the work of Abadía-Rexach and Godreau in order to explore the ways in which the NPRBM groups use bomba to assume —as well as expand and limit— government-sponsored racialized and gendered scripts. I argue that these groups are reproducing certain aspects of what is considered authentic bomba, as well as (re)writing them while challenging and replicating essentialist notions of blackness and expanding the dominant ideologies through performance. Specifically, I attend the role that the deployments of tradition through creative expressions play in this dialectic process.

In order to address this topic, I conducted an ethnographic study from October 2018 to February 2019 of contemporary practices of bomba in Puerto Rico, focusing in Taller Tamboricua's BombAeróbicos classes offered at Parque Lineal in Bayamón, a town in the periphery of the island's capital. I also attended bomba events (like "bombazos"[9] and festivals of different groups and entities) in order to have a more complete look of the broader bomba panorama.

Even though racial and gender categories are certainly problematic, the use of them in this project aims to better understand how individuals balance their own identifications with the dominant classifications. For race, I use Jorge Duany's racial terminology that includes

[9] A bombazo is an informal bomba session usually announced with little anticipation and that takes place in the streets or town squares.

major folk racial terms in Puerto Rico (2000), containing a variety of categories that attend the different ways in which racial mixture is understood among locals. Given that racial classification in the Island is different from the white/black predominant understandings in the United States, it is important to give nuances to how race is managed in Puerto Rico. I do this as an attempt to account for what Harry Hoetink (1967) understands as the wide-ranging racial continuum of the Caribbean.

In terms of gender, I see the category as a fluid spectrum where individuals can constantly move through according to the deployment of certain discourses and practices. Femininity and masculinity are therefore the ends of said spectrum, according to the hegemonic understandings in our patriarchal system. I also use the categories male/man and female/woman to describe my interpretation of the sexes of the people that I observed and interacted with during my fieldwork. While this research project did not explicitly considered gender as a research axis in its proposal stages, its relevance became evident during fieldwork. Observing and thinking how gendered blackness can, too, be performed and transited came in easy due to the socio-historical juncture in Puerto Rico where women rights have been endangered by local politics, male chauvinism and machista culture.

Relevance of the research

This study sheds light on how race is expressed in the Puerto Rican everydayness and how racial understandings in the Caribbean are constantly being created and (re)created. The relevance of this research lies on its potential for an analysis that can account for both the structural and the cognitive notions of race, allowing one to see how racial identities are self-ascribed and how are identifications managed (Okamura, 1981).[10] As Thomas Holt explains, "racialization has been most effective, where it *makes* race", or where it "might be un-made"

[10] This is parallel to what J.L.A. García (1996) understands as the relation between the institutional (that is created from individual actions that are later contained in collective thought), and the individual (that occurs as what has been institutionalized permeates in the subjects).

(1995, pp. 14, 18). Given the fact that it is in the everydayness where macro-level phenomena are lived, it is in those practices where race can be better seen as an active process rather than objective qualities or innate attributes (Tabili, 2003, p. 126-127). Therefore, by studying the ways in which these groups include bomba into everyday activities, one can analyze, on the one hand, how the manifestations of larger structures are reproduced in details of life, and on the other, how "mundane actions in the everyday may themselves transform the abstract structures" (Ausalander as quoted in Holt, 1995, p. 8).

In the pages that follow, I will contextualize this research in order to understand how bomba is represented in the broader panorama. Then, I will expose the existent literature in the topic that formed part of my theoretical framework in order to place the questions that guided this project. After exposing the research design and methods, I will deepen into my findings and my discussions. Finally, I will close with some conclusions and remarks about future projections of where I see this line of research developing.

Background context

Even though bomba represents an enigma of complex racial signifiers by itself, the issues that circulate it form part of a bigger social frame. As Isar Godreau (2015) argues, due to a process of institutional folklorization, blackness in Puerto Rico has usually been rendered two main spaces in the collective imaginary: a "negative" slot, (i.e., slavery) and a "positive" slot (i.e., music). This depiction of blackness has been widely spread through the ideological State apparatus that represents the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture (ICP for its acronym in Spanish). These ideologies have also been spread through the formal education programs at schools (like the institutionalization of the "Día de la Puertorriqueñidad" in November) perpetuating discourses of racial democracy, and through the continuous celebration of State and municipal governments-sponsored events. As a result, these ideologies have come to

form part of the wider social group's consciousness, being present even without recurrent State sponsorships.

Blackness's designated slots in this nation-building rhetoric are supported by the public sphere's discussions, as it is shown in the local newspapers. Race-related discussions in Puerto Rico tend to arise in specific times: when openly racists comments towards public figures the United States surface (Rivera Saniel, 2014), or when a reggaetonero is rumored to be a santero (Torres Torres, 2009) or when santería is put into the public focus (Figueroa Rosa, 2013). Other instances where race has become the main focus on the local news are when Afro-Puerto Rican politicians are the objects of racist comments (Rodríguez Sánchez, 2011) and, notably, when March arrives and the Abolition of Slavery is about to be commemorated (Del Valle Hernández, 2009). This aligns with what Jorge Giovannetti (2007) has pointed out about racial topics being part of public discussions only in festive days. In his words, "fuera de estos días, el tema racial permanence en silencio. La "raza" en Puerto Rico es, si se quiere, un "holiday affair"' (2007).

Due to its inextricable connection to blackness and to its broader panorama, bomba has also become embedded in these public discussions. Before the last two decades, and due to the cultural scaffolding produced by the nationalist discourses tied to the new colonial state formation that emerged in the 1950's, bomba was considered a stamp of the country's history. Bomba was folklorized, and this contributed to black Puerto Ricans being also ascribed to nostalgia, exotism, fantasy, and difference (this discussion will be amplified later on). However, a notable shift in the discursive spaces assigned to bomba occurred around 1990's, where bomba entered a post-folkloric period (Cartagena, 2004, p. 28). The public discussion that was arising regarding race in Puerto Rico sharpened when the 2000 Census showed that only 8% of Puerto Ricans identified themselves as Black (*El Nuevo Día*, 2011).

In what regards the sponsorship of bomba as a trope of the "black root" of Puertorricaness (González, 1992), evidence suggest that different groups that form part of the NPRBM have assumed part of the role of developing activities that make up for the lack of production by the ICP. In some cases, these new groups use bomba as an instrument to deliver a particular message (as happens in political activities, such as Bombazos Contra la Junta) or organize activities with the sole purpose of performing bomba (La Magia de los Tambores). Either way, they receive significant coverage by the local newspapers (Pérez, 2019; López de Azúa & Rexach Olivencia, 2019; Santiago Arce, 2019), which indicates a shift on how is bomba depicted in the country's media.

Literature Review

Nation-Building Projects and Ideological State Apparatuses

The dynamics of resignification that I study take place within the larger sociocultural scene of the nation. Understanding the reproductive, subversive, resistant, and repressive processes that occur within the nation requires first understanding its construction and legitimacy. That is, in order to make sense of how or why people feel the need to react in some way to what has been built as a nation, one must ask first how were those borders delimited, and what forces hold them together.

As Louis Althusser (1988) argues, there are a series of ideological state apparatuses that are used to organize and reproduce different ideas about what *the people* is as a political and ethnic entity.[11] The notion of people —that is, the imagining of a nation (Anderson, 1983)— is meant to create a feeling of sameness and belonging among a particular group of subjects found inside a given territory that allows for the downplaying of differences in order to produce a universalized feeling of unity. The State's capacity of doing so is what Pierre

[11] These ideological apparatuses can be created specifically for nationalist purposes (like cultural centers) as can be institutionalized to produce and reproduce multiple ideologies such as family, education, and church (Althusser, 1988).

Bourdieu (1991) conceptualizes as it having the control over the monopoly of the symbolic power; this is channeled through ideological apparatuses that enable the official discourse to select specific aspects to highlight or to obscure in order to produce a sense of unity.

Given that national projects involve both exclusion and inclusion, an "other" has to be identified in order to constitute an "us". The effects that the State ideological apparatuses produce are at the core of what Foucault understood that defines governmentality in modern states (1991). Some of the ways in which control can be expressed is through the constitution of a unifying sense that can occur by building upon notions of shared traits.

Cultural nationalism

One of the shared traits that can be co-opted and used by the State to aggregate a group of people under one ideology in order to constitute a nation or to "stich up differences into one identity" is through the sharing of culture (cited in Wade, 2001, p. 853). Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2011) has already pointed out how the concept of culture has been used politically to reproduce unequal power relations, through its deployment as an euphemism to mean *race.* In this case, those who control the state apparatus use their symbolic power to "name, to identify, to categorize, to state what is what and who is who", and are able to determine what is constituted as national culture (Brubaker and Cooper, 2002, p. 15). Consequently, the State identifies what is culture and what is not through a process where "dominant voices privilege certain aspects of history and culture, normalizing, and marginalizing others" (Wade, 2001, p. 853).

The State sponsors the construction of a cultural identity that, as Stuart Hall suggests, works a "sort of collective 'one true self' […] with a shared history and ancestry hold in common" (1990, p. 223). This institution cannot "create" identities, but since it has the material and symbolic resources, it can "impose the categories, the classificatory schemes,

and modes of social counting and accounting to which non-state actors must refer" as they relate to each other (Brubaker and Cooper, 2002, p. 16).

Several authors have pointed out the ways in which nation-building projects that are deployed through an imaginary of cultural sameness can be intertwined with race.[12] Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (1991) argue that a "fictive ethnicity," constructed from an ethnic base, can be activated in order to imagine a community as something natural (p. 96). This aligns with what Trouillot (2011) points out regarding the "essentialist turn" that culture took when it replaced race in the political discourse, naturalizing aspects that were already thought in the academy as cultural and not natural. Hence, as in some States the political discourse fluctuated from race to ethnicity (Okamura, 1981), in others, culture became a key term that replaced while at the same time absorbed all that was contained in race. Wade, making reference to the work of Raymond Williams, pushes further the relationship between race and nation, proposing the image of them sharing a unity of substance like blood, thus representing how are cultural characteristics essentialized and assigned to particular bodies that contain it (2001, p. 849). In the case of Latin America, it has been presented as a common political phenomenon to activate notions of racial democracy that hide systematic racism and see racial relations as harmonious and racial tensions as very superficial, equaling this sameness in race as sameness in culture (Andrews, 2007).

Cultural nationalism in Puerto Rico

In Puerto Rico, cultural nationalism has been deployed in different ways. However, the nationalist ideas that were created as part of Governor Luis Muñoz Marín's populist project from the 1950's have been dominant. This discourse contrasted with "la generación del treinta" or the 1930s literary generation discourse that mostly held Spanish referents like the figure of the jíbaro (*whitened* Puerto Rican peasant) at high esteem (Guerra, 1998).

[12] At this level of analysis, race can be understood as an ideology based on phenotypic characteristics that is both structural and structuring.

Muñoz Marín's narrative did more than that; it's "Puerto Rican culture" discourse, that was triggered by the Popular Democratic Party (PPD, in its Spanish acronym), had as an objective to function as a unity mechanism that included all three main cultural heritages (African, Spaniard, and Taíno), in order to appeal to all Puerto Ricans. In words of Isar Godreau, "Muñoz knew that Spanish referents were an important identity marker for an educated elite but remained a distant referent for the majority of the Puerto Rican *mulato* and black population" (2015, p. 180).

However, although this rhetoric was more inclusive of the cultural diversity that existed in the country, all racial groups were not represented in equal ways. Some aspects of traditions were privileged, while others that had been historically invisibilized or marginalized were adopted—or rather, co-opted—with the same intention of homogenizing. As Wade puts it, "diversity does not just break through the official image of homogeneity; it is contained within that image" (2001, p. 854) for it is necessary for the majority of the population to be able to self-identify inside the nationalist discourse.

In Puerto Rico, that image of homogeneity anchored in racial democracy found its base on the discourse of racial mixture, hence allowing Puerto Rican culture to be *distinctive* among others because of its particular mix that differentiates it, and letting Puerto Ricans unify identities into one category (Godreau, 2015, p. 178-182). This put the relation between nation, culture, and race into place and was done through the creation of the ICP, which operates as an ideological state apparatus and developed the notion of "the great Puerto Rican family" or "la gran familia puertorriqueña".

La gran familia puertorriqueña

The ICP was created in 1955 and was devoted to "conserve, promote, enrich, and disseminate the cultural values of the 'pueblo' of Puerto Rico, and to bring about their broadest and most profound knowledge and appreciation" (Law 89 of June 21, 1955, of

L.P.R.; quote taken from Petra R. Rivera, 2010, p. 47). The ICP undertook as a task the definition of Puerto Rican culture monolithically as the combination of the ethnic triad including the Spaniard, the Taíno, and the African "roots" that through history have melted and created the actual cultural identity. The images of the roots that form the tree that constitutes Puerto Rican culture nourished the vision of a homogeneous society that has "gotten over" its racial differences (González, 1992). As Godreau puts it, the racial interpretation of the great Puerto Rican family provides "the identity tools and common historical roots deemed necessary for guiding Puerto Ricans to a better, modern, and industrialized future" (2015, p. 183). With this, every root gets recognized for contributing different traits to the race and culture Puerto Ricans share nowadays in the so-called conflict-free, homogeneous society that served political interests for those who deployed it. It was, after all, very important for the PPD and its leader Muñoz Marín to present Puerto Rico as a nation that differed culturally from the United States—so that statehood ideas could be thought to be inappropriate—, but socially aggregated enough to be able to self-manage—thus allowing for a certain degree of sovereignty.

However, the way in which each of the "roots" was thought and the attributes that they were given by the ICP greatly differ, hence assigning them different levels of importance and recognition. In words of Petra Raquel Rivera (2010, p. 6) "discourses of hybridity attempted to unify a population under the banner of race mixture while keeping intact hierarchical structures that privileged whiteness" and kept blackness marginalized just as la "generación del 30" and other cultural nationalist had previously done.

As part of the selective process in which traditions are constructed, the Spanish heritage continues to be exalted as the one that gave Puerto Rico more *culture* through language and religion. Meanwhile, the Taíno root has been constructed as the one that provided the land or the setting for the development of the culture. Finally, the African root

has been thought as the one that put the workforce for the constitution of the country. The fact that the idea of racial mixture that is officially promoted by the State pushes notions of blanqueamiento evidence that hierarchal structures are being kept the same. In this way, blackness is not invisibilized as in the generación del 30's discourse, but rather it is used to articulate a discourse of diversity that allows the population the right to be part of the nation.

Fast-forward several years, and the government's fiscal crisis has provoked a shift on the tasks that the ICP undertakes. Yet, the dominant imaginaries of racial democracy are structurally imbricated in Puerto Rico's society, being reinforced by the media and by other cultural entities.

The State-Sponsored Scripts of Blackness

The spaces that blackness is allowed to occupy in the cultural nationalist discourse are limited and refer to Afro-referential symbols that almost exclusively allow them two slots. One of them is slavery, which in the official rhetoric is softened as "hard work". The other one is music, usually downplayed or articulated as "sabor" or flavor, which refers to the joy that African rhythms bring. As a result, African descent is generally understood as not intellectual, light and pertaining to the emotional realm. Through its role as an ideological State apparatus, the ICP domesticates these views by celebrating the African root, but within the confines of those notions included in the nationalist discourse sponsored by Muñoz's government. This results in blackness being thought as a *phase* that was overcame just as slavery was abolished, as if once that slavery ended, blackness did too. Under that logic, blackness is seen as something that "disappeared" —like slavery, the institution to which it was historically connected— leaving only a cultural footprint in artistic expressions such as dance and music that still remain nowadays. By limiting blackness to these contributions, the official discourses leave out the possibility of blacks to provide in other realms, like in those related to intelligence, which is linked to the European/Spaniard heritage. These expressions

are also idealized as past contributions to the modern Puerto Rican culture, which intensifies the view of blackness as part of the country's future-past.

In this way, even though blackness is celebrated institutionally, it ends up being *folklorized*, as Godreau (2002) has shown, through a process in which black people are assigned feelings of nostalgia, exotism, fantasy, and difference. Hence, the State capitalizes over social consensuses assigned to black people, producing certain "scripts" for them (Godreau, 2015, p. 14). Even though this is a phenomenon that is recurrent in the Caribbean and occurs with different genres (like rumba in Cuba), in Puerto Rico bomba is the music the genre *par excellence* that has been linked to black people in institutional ways.

Godreau considers the government-sponsored scripts of blackness as the "dominant narratives and stories that set standards, expectations, and even spatial templates for what is publicly recognized, celebrated, and sponsored as black and Puerto Rican" (2015, p. 14). These scripts legitimize certain elements as authentic, thus creating dichotomies between what is Puerto Rican black and what is not. Said authenticity can be indexicalized in different levels: authentic blackness might be situated in spatial templates[13] or in particular bodies. As Frantz Fanon so rightly expressed, the body becomes a "crushing objecthood" (1967, p. 82) assuming notions of what it can or cannot do. That is why, in the words of E. Patrick Johnson, "skin color works in particular functions to legitimate claims of black authenticity", and thus "these stances are misguided attempts to essentialize blackness by ontologically linking the body with cultural performance" (2003, p. 191).

The State-Sponsored Scripts of Black Femininity

Not only has the State sponsored the assignment of the African root scripts to black people, but these discourses have become especially embodied in female corporeality. For

[13] John L. Jackson argues that places of economic precarity can attach within themselves notions of blackness as essential, thus situating blackness as inherent to ghettos (2001). Isar Godreau examines how blackness can be placed where Black populations have been located decades ago (2015).

Johnson, there has been a tendency to essentialize "mystic figures" into black female bodies in Western societies (2003, p. 110). This phenomenon has been well documented in the Caribbean, where, according to Melissa Blanco-Borelli, darker female bodies have been referred to only in terms of their physical appearance (2015). For early twentieth-century Puerto Rico, Lillian Guerra argues that "women were viewed as essentially good and essentially bad […] This means that women became the Other in the nationalist discourse" (1998, p. 249). Moreover, social imaginaries have conceived femininity as a mysterious essence characterized for being natural and eternal (Young, 1980). Femininity, then, tends to be associated with sensuality and dance, which at the same time is relegated to weakness. In the words of Ann Daly, "movement itself has traditionally been consigned to the realm of the feminine" (1988, p. 43).

What Johnson, Blanco-Borelli, Guerra, Young, and Daly have argued is evidenced in Puerto Rico, where black women bodies have been delegated to spaces of sensuality and hypersexualization. As Isar Godreau has explained (2003):

> These signifiers of "negroid culture"—the representation of the Black person as primitive, hypersexualized, non-rational and almost instinctively animalistic—are dynamically channeled through the body of the black woman. It is the woman who is considered the repository par excellence of negroid folklore.

This exotization and mystification of the body becomes problematic, considering that is not only founded over essentialist notions, but also leads to the stigmatization of certain bodies limiting who can be Afro-Puerto Rican. The scripts of black femininity therefore remit to certain body features and movements that become hypersexualized (i.e., breasts, shoulders, hips, and buttocks). These discourses have been manifested through different cultural expressions, being bomba one of the most privileged ones.

The propositions of these authors are tested bellow in regard to how certain understandings about black women become part of the collective conscience and are manifested in a number of bomba expressions. Conversely, particular individuals can also appropriate these scripts of black femininity in order to challenge them in the "batey". [14]

Bomba as a Cultural Expression

Before examining the particular case of bomba music in Puerto Rico and its inextricable connection with blackness, it is important to highlight first the role that music has played in nation-building projects, particularly those Afro-Caribbean music genres. Georgina Born (2011) argues that music can be understood as a "constellation of mediations", which leads it to be both the product of relations and the resignifier of pre-existing social connections. In her words, "musical performance is not only entangled in wider social identity formation, but has the capacity to reconfigure or catalyze those formations" (Born, 2011, p. 380). Thus, in the State effect of identification, music can be used to trigger particular imageries of nation.[15] This is precisely what occurs with bomba music.

A cultural expression of music, dance, and performance, bomba developed as a unifying language for Africans that were brought as slaves to Puerto Rico during the Spaniard colonization period. According to several authors, its development as a community dance was more frequent in the coastal regions of the Island given the high concentrations of enslaved in these areas. Also, it was characterized by the pouring of all of the African variety and complexity into the genre (Álvarez Nazario, 1960; Cartagena, 2004; Abadía-Rexach,

[14] Batey is an indigenous, Caribbean word that would define the space, demarked by rocks, where the taínos—the pre-Columbian population in the Island— would organize their celebrations. In bomba, it refers to the dance circle, thus been a synonym for soberao.
[15] Music can also be used for self-identifications that subvert or resist hegemonic discourses that are activated by the State. I will explore this further later when exploring how the bomba groups that appear in the post-folkloric period might be doing this.

2015). Passed as an oral tradition—and with differentiated styles according to the geographical region in which it was produced—bomba kept being a "festive act of collective celebration, a community act rite of imitation, a neighborly form of inexpensive recreation, and so on" (Barton, 2004, p. 75). As a result, the dance was performed in public spaces like streets and "arrabales" (slums), and both men and women participants usually wore most of the time their casual, working clothes. Since bomba was—and still is—inherently related to enslaved Africans and their descendants, bluntly racist political and legal actions were constantly taken against the genre and its performers. Even after the 1898 United States invasion, bomba kept being threatened due to racial prejudice: there were even public order codes that prohibited its playing and dancing in public spaces up to 1920 (Abadía-Rexach, 2015).

As the new political climate emerged in Puerto Rico during Muñoz Marín's government in the 1950s and as the sponsorship of cultural homogeneity among Puerto Ricans occurred, music—particularly bomba—took an important space as representative of the African "root". It was not until after the 1970s, however, that the ICP became a center focused on folk music and folk dance (Godreau, 2015, p. 187). This shift in the Institute's objective resulted in the official recognition of bomba and plena groups. Folkloric dances like Los Hermanos Ayala, La Familia Cepeda, and Los Guayacanes de San Antón became affiliated to the ICP. Consequently, bomba was considered a form of *art* (Abadía-Rexach, 2015). The genre that was once prohibited, marginalized and portrayed as grotesque by the State started being thought of as an expression of Puertorricanness since it inevitably remitted to a common history among the population. Culturally, a relevant shift occurred in the imagery of what was *culture* and part of the *nation*—from being a vulgar, dirty, and primitive dance of blacks, bomba began to be considered a stamp of the country's history. Bomba,

therefore, was folklorized, and given its inextricable connection to blackness, it contributed to black people being given the same feelings of nostalgia, exotism, fantasy, and difference.

Parallel to the folklorization—and against the ICP's policy—bomba also experienced a process of commercialization (Abadía-Rexach, 2015, p. 91). But in this domain, despite its symbolic richness, "bomba was reduced to one form of expression by perhaps its most important artist in the last half of the twentieth century: Rafael Cortijo" (Cartagena, 2004, p. 18). The genre was homogenized and had a bigger reach to the masses, creating a distinctive and repetitive sound that included other instruments and that could be easily identified with *Cortijo y su Combo*. This musical group—composed by mostly black men—managed to coexist with folkloric bomba while contributing to the popularization of a genre that in the past had been put in the margins of the cultural nationalism imagery. This coexistence probably contributed to the way in which later salsa and bomba appear in the same venues or share spaces in festivals.

Since the 1990s, bomba music entered a post-folkloric period where a more informal approach to the genre took the place of commercialization.[16] Resting in the work of Alamo-Pastrana, Godreau comments on the reemergence of bomba among youth, and how these performances have been a venue for "challenging racism, dominant notions of masculinity, and colonialism" (2015, p. 188-189). In those first attempts to incorporate bomba in the contemporary space by adapting to modern realities, however, the genre encountered a lot of conflict (Barton, 2004). Great challenges were faced due to the Puerto Rican notion of what is and is not culture. Bomba usually fell on the latter category.

Bárbara Abadía-Rexach (2015) identifies some groups that have taken as an objective to

[16] The post-folkloric period of bomba refers to the new renaissance that the genre has had in the last decades. As Juan Cartagena points out, bomba is now not only presented as a proxy of Puerto Rico's past, but as a "dynamic modality for contemporary expression (2004, p. 28). This is evident in the use of it for advertising, commercial albums, and even musical mixture with other genres such as hip-hop.

educate and promote bomba as part of the Puerto Rican culture. What she defines as the NPRBM consists of groups that appeared by the 1990s and are mostly found in San Juan, hence being accessible to a vast majority of non-black individuals (Abadía-Rexach, 2015, p. 3). According to her research, people who participate in these movements claim that they were taught by "bombeadores" y "bombeadoras"[17] in a "traditional context," even though they are not all phenotypically black, and they practice bomba in non-traditionally ways. These groups are formed mostly by women and have a noticeable presence on the social media. The NPRBM is also characterized by reappropriating bomba, since they take it from the stages and give it back its sense of community—the participants dance in public spaces, do so with or without skirts, and subvert gender roles, since in many instances women are the ones playing the drums (Power-Sotomayor, 2015).

This subversion also manifests in the use of bomba in creative ways that intersect with the Puerto Rican everydayness. A resignification of what bomba is has been taking place within this movement: a new meaning is added to that first *cultural signifier* that bomba is—which is a symbol that inextricably refers to blackness and the past. According to Abadía-Rexach, bomba is used as a new front that "lucha a favor de la visibilización de la cultura puertorriqueña, [haciendo] hincapié en los elementos Afro de la sociedad" (2015, p. 4).

Theoretical Framework

As it is evident by now, my research demands a theoretical framework that deals with race, social processes, semiotics/symbolism in human interactions, and music as a medium of cultural communication. Below I outline briefly some ideas by authors that will be key to my analysis.

I found Laura Tabili's conceptualization of race (2003) as useful in my study. Building on the work of E. P. Thompson, she understands race as "a relationship, and not a

[17] Bombeadores/as refer to men and women that participate of bomba.

thing." Seeing race as a process rather than a fixed category allows us to consider the context that both produces and reproduces social formations. Race is therefore, not something static, but something that is in the intersection of "multiple social processes that have shaped history" (Tabili, 2003, p. 126). Her approach can be combined with Stuart Hall's conceptualizations of race as a floating signifier—in the sense that it cannot be essentialized nor fixed, but "subject to the constant process of redefinition and appropriation" (Hall, 2002). The historical context of deployment becomes crucial. That is why in different occasions and at different moments, people might identify using one folk racial term—like jabao or jaba—while at others use a different one—like mulato or mulata. This dovetails with Peter Wade's argument of phenotype being linked to a particular history (2002, p. 4). In that way, the body, no matter which features are privileged at different instances, is inevitably a marker, or as Franz Fanon puts it, an "object in the midst of other objects"(1967, p. 82). [18]

I also see race as *situational*, drawing parallelisms with Jonathan Okamura's conceptualization of ethnicity (1981). This means that depending on the specific moment, different identities might emerge in the subjects that participate in them, and thus there might be shifts both in self-identification and in the ways in which one identifies others. The particular situations that interested me took place in what Thomas Holt understands as the *everydayness*, and by looking at racial dynamics in this level, one can see how are ideologies manifested—as well as produced—in wider social aspects.[19]

The "situations" or everyday settings that I study are connected to bomba as a cultural expression of Afro-Puertorrican music, dance, and performance. The immersion of bomba

[18] Laurance Robitaille understands the body as such an important marker in what corresponds to race that she recognizes that by using it as an analytical device, one can understand how "diverse racial and national meaning are created, inscribed, and negotiated through discourse and practice" (2014, p. 231).

[19] This level can also be understood as what Harry Hoetink understands as the category of racial relations in superficial, everyday intercourse, which "form part of the social atmosphere, the *ambiance*, in which people live together" and establish "the rules of behavior which regulate the inter-personal but not intimate contact between groups" (1967, p. 21).

into everyday imaginaries is made by bomba groups that are characterized for appearing during what Halbert Barton calls the "post-folkloric period of bomba" (2004). To identify more precisely these groups, I use Abadía-Rexach's idea of the New Puerto Rican Bomba Movement (2015), and consider the institutionalized scripts as defined by Godreau (2015) to understand how individuals use them as well as (re)write them.

My work also takes a semiotic approach to bomba, understanding it as a sign formed by a signified and a signifier, following Ferdinand de Saussure's conception of the linguistic sign (1998). In our case, the signified of bomba comes to be the performance of music and dance, while its signifier is its folkloric, past African-related, traditional interpretations. I think of bomba in this way in order to examine its contemporary expressions as processes of resignification, that is, the adding on of new signifiers or meanings. Employing Roland Barthes' work (1957), I examine how the new bomba expressions might work as a new signifier for bomba, since they depict it as a performable everyday activity.

This research project also parts from the premise that music works as a constellation of mediations, thus simultaneously reflecting identities and providing spaces for them to intensify, as well as allowing for the co-formation of them. As Georgina Born puts it, "musically imagined communities […] may reproduce or memorialize extant identity formations, generate purely fantasized identifications, or prefigure emergent identity formations by forging novel social alliances" (2011, p. 381). Following her work, I consider bomba from two perspectives: as a cultural production influenced by wider social identity formations, and as a musical manifestation conditioned by institutions that provide the "grounds for its production, reproduction and transformation" (Born, 2011, p. 378). This first level of analysis helps us study how can bomba be intertwined with race and gender, hence allowing for the creation and recreation of identifications. The second level of analysis allow

us to see the relation between what has been institutionalized and the discourse articulated by these groups.

Methodology

This research aimed to describe the realm of bomba activities and discourses in the contemporary everydayness. Moreover, it tried to answer the questions of how nationalist racial and gendered scripts are expressed and managed in a variety of bomba events, focusing in BombAeróbicos. In order to fulfill these objectives, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork from October 2018 to February 2019.

At the proposal stages of this project, my methodology focused only on racial understandings in BombAeróbicos. However, different circumstances resulted in the project expanding into various directions. To begin, the Comité Institucional para la Protección de los Seres Humanos en la Investigación (CIPSHI) authorization took longer than expected, approving the project in October 2018. I did fieldwork on BombAeróbicos from October 2018 to February 2019. There were several interruptions between November and January due mostly to the weather and long breaks between their "semesters". As an adjustment to the contingency of the everydayness, I did multi-sited fieldwork in other events beyond BombAeróbicos that informed my wider knowledge of the bomba scene. I searched for activities that could shed light on how racial and gendered understandings were managed in contemporary bomba settings. I then attended to a series of different events that ranged from municipal government-sponsored to private activities. The activities were:

1. October 2018: 8th Festival of Bomba and Plena in Hatillo.
2. November 2018: Retumba El Gandúl: Open Bombazo at El Hangar, Santurce.
3. December 2018: La Magia de los Tambores: Open Bombazo at Plaza de Armas, Old San Juan, organized by the Doña Caridad Brenes de Cepeda School of Bomba and Plena.

4. December 2018: La Magia de los Tambores: Open Bombazo at Plaza Antonia Quiñones, Condado, organized by the Doña Caridad Brenes de Cepeda School of Bomba and Plena.
5. December 2018: Tírate un Piquete: Closing Bombazo of Taller Tambuyé's semester at a private residence in Trujillo Alto.

These ethnographic visits nurtured my work allowing me to identify differences and similarities in the ways in which bomba is thought and practiced and its relationship with race, nation, and gender. I also did newspaper research and bibliographical research. I examined a sampling of newspaper articles from a variety of periodicals dating back to 2006 in order to see when and how was race and bomba addressed in the public sphere. The bibliographical research, as it will be evident throughout the text, included literature of the history of bomba, the sociology of music, anthropology and race, gender and semiotics, among other topics.

Furthermore, I examined the ICP's Instagram page (from November 26th to December 1st, and from December 5th to December 17th) so as to understand their role nowadays in the organization and promotions of cultural activities in the country. As a result of the diverse assortment of data collected, this research became more intersectional, considering issues of commercialization, race, and gender in the uses of bomba in everyday life.

Despite the instability of BombAeróbicos sessions at the time, the month of February 2019 represented the period of more systematic immersion attending to a series of four classes that had a standard routine. The BombAeróbicos sessions where I conducted my fieldwork were instructed in a basketball court at Parque Lineal in Bayamón on Thursdays from 5:00 to 6:00 PM. Taller Tamboricua offered these classes under the sponsorship of Medical Card System (MCS), a health insurance company that, as part of its ventures, funds different weekly exercise sessions around the island for their beneficiaries, focusing on the

elderly. I also attended a Zumba class offered in the same place and time under MCS sponsorship on a Tuesday in order to compare the participation levels and the dynamics that occurred there with those of BombAeróbicos. I participated of the BombAeróbicos and the Zumba classes and observed and talked to some people in the rest of the activities, taking notes at the moment in my phone or after the activities were finished.

The reason for doing fieldwork of these activities rested on my belief that this was the best way to capture the ephemeral moments that interested me.[20] As Sara Cohen points out, the ethnographic study of popular music allows to see the specific social contexts in which it is produced, and this can be helpful in order to examine "across a range of intersecting contexts and networks to make sense of the music derived within one particular setting" (1993, p. 135).

The discussion will therefore address how Taller Tamboricua's use of bomba facilitates its racial and gendered scripts of (re)invention, thus reproducing and challenging essentialist notions of blackness and femininity. I will also present a section examining the corporate sponsorships and its implications on the adoption of the traditional scripts in order to understand the contemporary uses of bomba and their imbrication in local commercialization processes.

Discussion

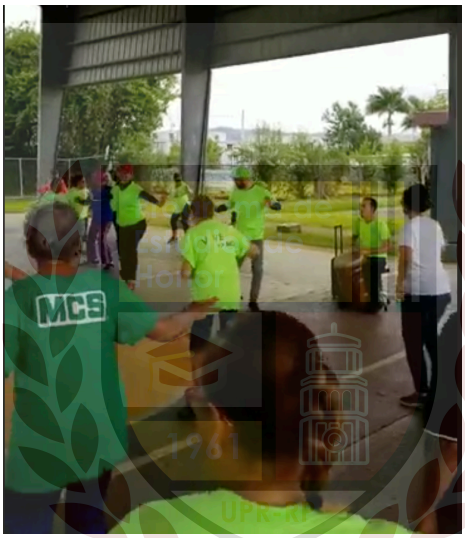
Finding out about BombAeróbicos

I first learned of BombAeróbicos in 2017 when I came upon a video from Taller Tamboricua, the group organizing them under the sponsorship of MCS, while navigating through Facebook. The video presented older people —a racially mixed, female crowd— repetitively executing bomba movements first performed by a male instructor as he kept

[20] For Carlos Buitrago arguments, the use of fieldwork can be able to demonstrate, through the use of theoretical framework, for the understanding of relevant relationships between different segments of social life (1973, p. 205).

"piqueteando"[21]. In this audiovisual material (that can be seen in Figure 1) I could identify a strong interplay between folklore and everyday life[22] as well as marketing practices/strategies. Similarly, I could recognize interesting racial and gender dynamics that were, without a doubt, worth exploring due to the visual interplay between folklore and what Tamboricua called *culture*. As a result, I immersed myself into Tamboricua's Facebook page, looking for ways to attend to these events in person.

Figure 1: BombAeróbicos session (2018)



At the time I saw the video, BombAeróbicos were offered in different locations –Guayama, Carolina, Caguas, and Bayamón— at different moments of the week, being relatively frequented by MCS beneficiaries due to the company's financial support and advertising (Figure 2). However, by the time I started my fieldwork —during the last quarter of 2018— BombAeróbicos' participation had declined considerably. In addition, as I learned later on, some of the offerings at other locations –like the classes given at Guayama and Carolina—

[21] Piqueteando is the act of doing "piquetes", which in bomba refers to the making of movements that the dancers make with the shoulders, hips, buttocks, and foot stepping in order for the primo to follow.

[22] Jade Power Sotomayor's work (2015) expands this discussion by exploring the continuous, modern dialogue between the "soberao" (circular space around the primo where bomba dance is performed) and the bomba stage.

were canceled after MCS's sponsorship withdrawal. As a result, my most intense fieldwork took place during a time of a lot of uncertainty for the BombAeróbicos.

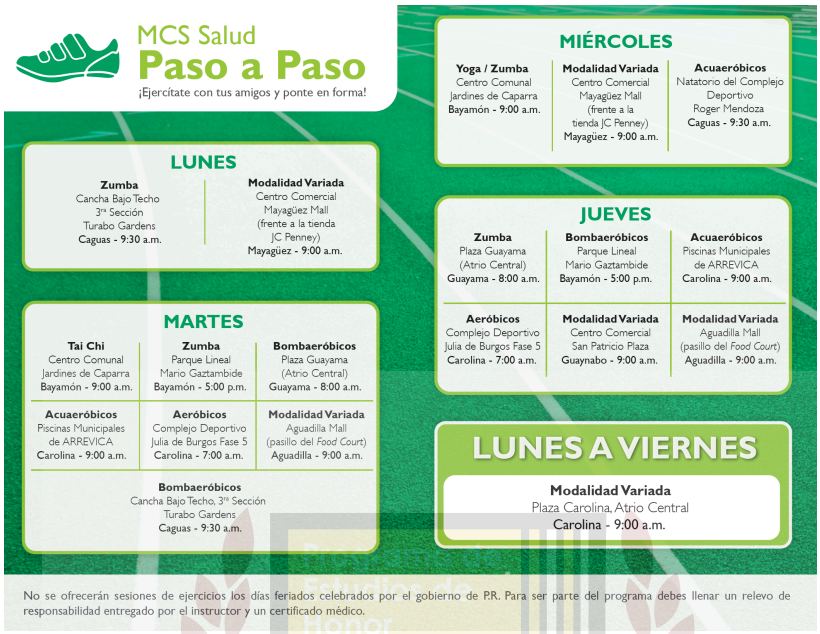


Figure 2: MCS Salud Paso a Paso activity calendar

Thick-describing BombAeróbicos[23]

Even though the amount of participants changed from session to session, attendance was always between five to ten women, with the exception of one time, when José, a "trigueño"[24] 60 year-old man joined the class.[25] All the participants ranged from 50 to 70 years old (except for me) and the crowd was racially mixed, including the participation of some black women. Specifically, there were three: Ana, a woman who attended to all the classes; Mercedes, a black woman that used to bring her grandkids along, and Elena, a Dominican woman, the second youngest of the group after me.

[23] The descriptions made here are from my Field Journal from October 20th, 2018 till February 28th, 2019.
[24] Trigueño refers to "literally, a wheat colored or brunette" (Duany, 2005).
[25] These names are not the participants' real ones. The purpose of giving them pseudonyms, apart from protecting their identity, is so that the discussions of particular situations—as well as future references to them—flow properly.

There were two men in charge of the class: a primo and a "bailador".[26] Daniel, who was the colorao dance instructor, directed all the classes making the participants mimic his moves, while one drummer played the primo, following Daniel's moves. Héctor, the jabao man, played in the first two classes, and Víctor, the black man with dreadlocks in his hair, played for the last three. The instructors were younger than the participants, all probably in their thirties. The participants wore exercise clothes in different varieties, from t-shirts with leggings to lycra shirts with yoga pants. Unlike some BombAeróbicos videos I had watched, neither the instructor nor the participants wore the traditional bomba skirts, which meant that they made their piquetes as if they were holding imaginary skirts. Moreover, all of those that executed authoritative positions—Daniel, Héctor and Víctor—would wear green t-shirts with the MCS logos during BombAeróbicos, which greatly disrupts the traditional scripts ascribed to bomba since no one was wearing traditional bomba outfits.

At the beginning of each class, the primo would set up the barril while participants sign an attendance sheet indicating if they were MCS healthcare beneficiaries. Everyone would effusively greet each other and put their belongings on the corners of the basketball court. Daniel would begin by making some sort of announcement, which usually revolved around the absenteeism in the group and ways to abate it, and reminding everyone of how crucial it was to keep inviting other people to join. Participants would typically shed some reason as to why people were not coming to the class, but continuously ended up promising to convince other potential participants.[27] When everyone was in their respective space, the class was ready to start.

[26] Primo can refer to a drum or a drummer. A bailador refers to the masculine gender of dancer, while a bailadora refers to the feminine gender.

[27] One of the explanations that the participants gave for the general lack of attendance was the hour of reunion, which was particularly uncomfortable for people that worked. They would also provide with specific reasons for people not to go depending on the day: being absent on Valentine's Day, for example, was a justified absence among the group.

Usually, every session would have a standard routine beginning with a warm-up. The primo would play a slow rhythm, not following any particular movements made by Daniel, the bailador, while the latter directed us onto stretching. After approximately five minutes, Daniel announced what kind of exercises (whether we would we working out lower or upper body) and what style of bomba ("sicá" or "holandés", for example[28]) we would be focusing for the day. The class would be split in half with a two to three minute pause in the middle. Even though the routine order changed on all six occasions I was present, the movements made were consistent and present in all the sessions. There would be, for example, piquetes to the sides or the front and "faldeo"[29].

These movements were performed in different settings: in some occasions a batey would open up so that we could perform the recently learned routine as the main bailadora. In other moments, a circle would form for each to run around it one by one while the others danced-exercised. Other times, the "faldeo" would be performed with bandanas, which would simulate skirts and make more explicit the bomba-dancing part of the movement. The sessions would usually end with a set of a routine that included all movements and a series of enthusiastic yells from all the participants, encouraged by the instructors. They would usually want to finish the class with selfies and videos for the WhatsApp group named "MCS Bomba Aeróbico KJ", a group created by the participants and the coordinators (all administered the chat) to keep anyone informed of any circumstance that prevented the class from meeting. Some of these videos would then end up in Taller Tamboricua's Facebook page, further promoting their enterprise.

Race and Everydayness in Contemporary Bomba Settings

[28] Sicá and holandés refer to two of the several types of bomba that can be found in the country.
[29] Faldeo refers to strong, clean-cut movements that BombAeróbicos dancers do that resemble the traditional bomba skirt holding.

Even though BombAeróbicos where a routine activity, I was fortunate to witness several situations where structural realities regarding the use of traditional scripts of bomba were adopted and expanded through the creative, modern expression of the dance-exercise. What follows is a discussion of some of the key elements that I was able to identify regarding how the larger ideological structures of race are both reproduced and transformed in this micro-level action.

Racial scripts in BombAeróbicos. Several authors have documented the attempts of Caribbean grass-root groups that have used traditional cultural manifestations and have transformed them into marketable items for consumption (see Waxer 2002, Robitallie 2014, Abadía-Rexach 2015). What is nowadays occurring in Puerto Rico with bomba and the NPRBM could be classified as such: self-managed groups are taking the signifier —that is, the performance tradition of music and dance— and endowing it with a new meaning — bomba as a fun opportunity rich in cultural capital to exercise. This process is more evident in the NPRBM news interviews, where leaders like Elia Cortés state their mission:

> eso es parte importante de lo que nosotros queremos hacer aquí; revivir nuestro género musical de la bomba, sacarlo de la gaveta de la Navidad y que la gente entienda que se puede utilizar todos los días de forma cotidiana.[30]

Cortés' comment is consonant with the task that the NPRBM undertakes and that Abadía-Rexach notices. For her, the collective "persigue su incorporación fija y permanente entre las prácticas de cultura popular del país y busca apropiarse de las calles y de otros escenarios fuera de los tradicionalmente asignados a la bomba." (2015, p. 119). Furthermore, in the coordinator's comment one can see how the first assigned meaning for bomba by State-sponsored discourses –that is, bomba as an African dance, a past, folkloric, staged

[30] "This is an important part of what we want to do here; to revive our musical genre that is bomba, to take it out of the Christmas [decoration] drawer and to make people understand that it can be used every day in a daily basis" (Elia Cortés, coordinator of Taller Tamboricua in interview with Ileana Delgado Castro, 2017).

performance and linked to what Godreau qualifies as folkloric blackness (2015)— gets replaced, or at least put in second place by the new activated meaning that qualifies bomba as an everyday activity that modern individuals can use throughout the year. This begs the question, then, of to what extent is the BombAeróbicos' semiotic contribution to bomba being effective on expanding the genre's slot in the collective imaginary. Or, more specifically, how successful is the detachment of bomba from its institutionalized scripts in BombAeróbicos, and how are people reading these signs?

On the one hand, the practice itself does resignifies bomba. Even though BombAeróbicos uses the rhythm from the traditional performance, the modality does modify the dance movements in order to appeal to older women who would see them as a viable exercising option –as an alternative like Zumba, for example— that they could execute as an everyday, modern activity. This demonstrates an inevitable symbolic change. Furthermore, BombAeróbicos presents an option of engaging in the genre without using the folkloric, colonial dresses, since the dance-exercise occurs with t-shirts and yoga pants. I use Roland Barthes's semiotic model that examines how an already established sign can become a signifier for a new sign, or as he calls it, a "myth". In his words:

> Myth is a peculiar system, in that it is constructed from a semiological chain which existed before: it is a *second-order semiological system*. That which is a sign (namely the associative total of a concept and an image) in the first system, becomes a mere signifier in the second (Barthes, 1957, p. 113).

Thus, the actions in which BombAeróbicos incur —the cloth changing and the "aerobization" of the movements— functions as the new meaning of bomba. At first glance, this could seem to have a totalizing effect, as if the new one replaced bomba's traditional and State-sponsored meaning.

However, I witnessed several situations where the resignification of bomba showed a lingering of its folkloric scripts and therefore of its first meaning. During the fourth BombAeróbicos session that I observed, María, one of the group participants, approached me to get my phone number so that she could add me to the WhatsApp group. She pressed me to come to the Zumba classes on Tuesdays, but emphatically urged me to not be absent on Thursdays, since it was well known by the group that the BombAeróbicos class was in danger of being shut down by MCS. When I asked María about the MCS sponsorship that Taller Tamboricua received for the classes, she expressed she would feel disappointment if it were lost because "ellos después de todo lo que quieren es enseñarnos *cultura*. Porque después, cuando vamos a fiestas, nadie baila bomba porque nadie sabe, y es una pena porque esa es nuestra *cultura*".[31] She then went to give me her theory as to why people were not attending the BombAeróbicos: "la realidad es que mucha gente de los martes no viene los jueves porque es de bomba".[32]

This comment unveils two ideological issues in María's discourse. First, she talks about how she sees the BombAeróbicos as a practice beyond a way to learn bomba while exercising; she understands it as a means to learn *culture*. The concept of culture is usually interchanged indiscriminately with folklore, which would point out to a conceptualization of bomba as a tradition and as part of the past. However, and as Trouillot has pointed out, in the "essentialist turn" that culture took when it replaced race in the global, political discourse in the last half of the 20th century, it became binomial of race, re-esencializing aspects that were already thought in the academy as cultural and not natural (2011). In some societies, culture became a key term that replaced (while at the same time absorbed) all that was contained in

[31] "They, after all, want to teach us *culture*. Because then, when we go to parties, no one dances bomba because no one knows how to, and it's a shame, because that is our *culture"*. My emphasis.
[32] Truth is, a lot of people from the Tuesdays classes don't come on Thursdays because it's bomba.

race. Therefore, expressions that overemphasize the use of culture, like María's, could be really overlapping racial understandings of bomba as something that belongs to all Puerto Ricans since, after all, they are a mixture of three races. Thus, the comment "this is our *culture*", more than connoting a traditional attachment, could be unveiling essentialized notions as *this is our race*, our racially-mixed race.

Furthermore, in Puerto Rico, culture became the agglutinating force for its national imageries: as Godreau comments (2015, p. 182), "'culture', in Muñoz's populist discourse became the container of past "traditions" (as expressed in music, religion, and folk art) and values (such as hospitality, modesty and decency) that all Puerto Ricans supposedly shared". The overlexication of culture by María, therefore, points to her ideological linkage of bomba to folkloric blackness, meaning that even though she is *enacting* a very different script of bomba, she can still *read* the institutionalized ones.

The second relevant issue that María's comment reveals is her speculation about why there is so little attendance to BombAeróbicos. She attributes this to a generalized dislike of bomba by the rest of the participants. At first I could not believe there was such a marked difference in terms of participation between both classes. However, after attending one Zumba class, I was convinced there must be a reason (or several) for it to be more than triple the participants in Zumba than in the most concurred session of BombAeróbicos. Although there could be many explanations for this[33], certainly María's hypothesis is very plausible: people could have felt reluctant to participate of BombAeróbicos because it is, in fact, bomba. If this were the case, then their unwillingness is likely rooted on the understandings of bomba as a folkloric activity and not as a modern one. This again remits to a particular

[33] One of the alternative –or coexisting— reasons for such disparate attendance between the two classes could be the conformability that the feminine participants feel with the instructors. In Zumba, the instructor is a woman of about the participants' median age, while in BombAeróbicos is a man at least 20 years older than most of the group.

form of folkloric blackness, which is the first meaning impregnated in bomba by State-sponsored discourses.

As a result, the resignification does not eliminate the first meaning: rather, they both coexist. In Cortés's discourse, the replacement of the first meaning by the second goes farther than in BombAeróbicos's practice, where scripts of bomba as a fun, modern exercise coincide with scripts of bomba as a traditional and folkloric expression. In other words, the promotion depiction of the activity expands much more the scripts of bomba than its practice, or rather, its audience reception does. Barthes (1957) makes this qualification, warning that the first meaning might never semiotically disappear: "one believes that meaning is going to die, but it is a death with reprieve; the meaning loses its value, but keeps its life, from which the form of the myth will draw its nourishment[34]" (p. 117).

Why are the same reasons that draw María into BombAeróbicos make the rest of the participants disinclined to participate in it, then? Why does the constant resurface of tradition (the fact that it is still bomba, thus it is still *culture* or folklore) in the exercise stimulate some participants while it disenchants others?

On the one hand, different audiences can experience co-existent, multiple reactions to a certain cultural product. Thus, the fact that folklore —and with this, its traditional racial scripts— can still be read on BombAeróbicos can be attractive for participants that are interested in performing something endowed with authenticity and the social reward of "hacer cultura"[35]. In other Latin American context, Laurence Robitaille (2014, p. 250) has commented on how social reward or "the possibility, both real and utopian to supersede race and participate in Brazilian culture through capoeira" can attract some people to the practice.

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[34] Barthes uses form also as a way to refer to the second sign that is created.

[35] "Doing culture". Arlene Dávila (1997) has pointed out that one of the ways in which independent or community groups claim authenticity is by promoting themselves as educators. This allows them to be portrayed as having genuine interest for "culture" by the public and to dissolve associations to profit making.

In BombAeróbicos, this became evident in the enjoyment and joyfulness of the participants during my fifth visit to BombAeróbicos, where Daniel handed out bandanas so that we could use them to perform the faldeo, as if we were wearing a skit.

At the same time, this legitimacy that can gain adepts to the activity might be unappealing to certain people that are looking to exercise in a fun manner without having to deal with the thorny issues of race, like those participants that attend to Zumba and not to BombAeróbicos. Conversely, some people might be attracted to the traditional connotation of the performance, but not to its more contemporary quotidian use. This reluctance to immerse into creative activities that contest the representations of folklore is not new in Puerto Rico. Arlene Dávila has argued that the dichotomy of folklore and modern life are dictated by the former being endowed with notions of authenticity and sacredness, while the latter is embedded to commercialism and impureness (1997, p. 220). Nevertheless, the ambivalent nature of the performance and its cohabitation of the two meanings that constantly interplay between tradition and modern life produce, in theory, an acceptable script, yet flexible enough for distinct people to interpret in different ways, resulting in practice in a very specific, small group of people interested.

* * *

However, performative challenges can arise during BombAeróbicos, even for the participants for which the activity is appealing because of its folklore/modern back-and-forth. For example, during my second visit to BombAeróbicos there was an instance in which we were invited by the instructor to dance alone at the batey *"*para divertirnos un poco*"*[36]. Daniel asked us to form a circle around the barril and explained the dynamic, which consisted

[36] "To have some fun".

of each one of us entering the batey, saluting the primo to "mantener algo de tradición y formalidad"[37], and performing the practiced routine by oneself.

As the barril started to play, the women were giggly and shy. It took a couple of seconds for Daniel to pressure us to take the opportunity of dancing in a batey. Two participants closer to the white end of the Caribbean racial continuum said that they wanted to do it together. They entered the batey and performed the routine making some mistakes and without saluting the primo. Then, two other women, who were similar in racial phenotype to the first duo, performed evidently nervous, too. At this point, Daniel politely reminded us to salute the barril before beginning to dance. Ana, one of the black participants, proceeded to enter the batey alone; she did the salute, performed the routine very well and said goodbye to the primo before exiting the circle. At the end, it was my turn with another participant, an Argentinian who was visiting; we entered the batey, following all the necessary steps except saying good-bye to the drum before leaving.

With this narration, I am not trying to relate the skillful performance of bomba to Ana's blackness. I do not know about her past experiences in the dance, nor can attribute her a more caring, respectful attitude toward the tradition than the other participants. Rather, what I want to unpack here relates to the nervousness of the participants, evident in their forgetful attitude towards both the routine and the saluting and saying goodbye.

Even though it is absolutely common to get stage fright, the participants' reluctance (including mine) to enter the batey alone might be indicating some resistance because of respect and sense of unbelonging to participate in an activity that, in our nationalist imaginary, is relegated to festive occasions and to deployments of our "past" African descent. The scripts of folkloric blackness surrounding bomba are imbricated in our ideas about nation and race as a result of worldviews that were transmitted to us through ideological State

[37] "Maintain some tradition and formality".

apparatuses, as Althusser (1988) acknowledges. As a result, even the idea of subverting said imaginaries by accessing to folklore in the everyday life destabilizes the participants due to feelings of unbelonging. That is, some participants might feel comfortable with the activity as long as it is somewhat detached from traditional bomba, but once there is a fissure where the "real bomba" has to be performed, it becomes a more delicate matter. Robitaille, in her study on capoeira, points out how the State discourses linger in participants' practices. As she comments, "its use in nation branding processes necessarily continues to inform how capoeristas interpret their practice and its place within the national context to which it is attached" (2014, p. 250).

In this situation, it is also possible to see not only the harmonious coexistence of the two meanings of bomba, but the *conflict* between them. The participants are constantly transiting through the notions of Godreau's folkloric blackness (2015) and Ramos-Zayas (2007) urban blackness, frequently going back and forth between the schema of the female and old folkloric script and the hip and modern tendencies of the modern script (Godreau, 2015, p. 17-18).

* * *

Even though this instance could be catalogued as subtle–or, as Wade puts it, as a "less obviously racialized domain of everyday action" (2001, p. 847)— there are other situations where racial discourses become more explicit. One example of this is the joking I quoted in the epigraph about whom instructor could do what in bomba according to their skin color. Another one would be when Elena, a black Dominican woman, participated of the BombAeróbicos classes during my fourth visit. Elena arrived a little after the session had already started, and when she began copying the instructor's movements, she was out of rhythm. The other participants pointed this out, to which she shyly answered "se me olvidaba

que esto es más baile que otra cosa".[38] Later on, when the movements that had to be performed included quite some hip rotations, and Elena was again off rhythm, one of the participants told her "¡Dale Elena, dale! ¡Mueve las caderas que eso es lo tuyo![39]". Elena looked at me –I was standing to her side— and told me that she has not danced in a while, as if she were excusing herself for not doing the movements as everyone expected her to.

Isar Godreau explains how in Puerto Rico blackness is discussed as being "somewhere else" geographically speaking, thus locating its phenotypic and cultural signs in other places like Haiti and the Dominican Republic; this is what she denominates as "discursive distance" (2002, p. 283). Those bodies are therefore read as the carriers of special dancing abilities, which is what that participant expected from Elena. Her Dominican black body became a marker of tropical sensuality, where certain rhythms and movements were essentialized to it (Martínez Tavares, 2004) and a "crushing objecthood" built upon Afro-referential rhythms was imposed in it by the eyes of the other (Fanon, 1967, p. 82).

Elena's comments on why she was out of rhythm could also be an indicator of Du Bois double consciousness (1903), since she seems to justify why she is not behaving as she should, or rather, she is being apologetic for not following the scripts. Thus, the scripts of blackness are not limited to Puerto Ricans nor only influence their behavior, but to anyone that find themselves in this space. This is due to how Stuart Hall qualifies cultural experience in the Caribbean: "as 'framed' by two axes or vectors, simultaneously operative: the vector of similarity and continuity; and the vector of difference and rupture (…) difference, therefore, persists—in and alongside continuity" (1990, p. 227). That continuity is what comes to be known as Afro-diasporism.

* * *

[38] "I had forgotten that this [the BombAeróbicos] is more dance than any other thing".
[39] "Go, Elena, go! Move those hips; this is your thing".

Racial scripts in more traditional settings. Another instance that exemplifies how the traditional scripts have molded the collective imaginary of what bomba should be and how it should be performed occurred during a "bombazo"[40], organized by the Doña Caridad Brenes de Cepeda School of Bomba and Plena in Plaza de Armas, Old San Juan in December 2018.

When I arrived to the bombazo, it had already started and the first dancer was beginning to approach the batey. There were around 40 to 50 people from different racial phenotypes located around the soberao and most of them were presumably Puerto Rican. Unintentionally, I located myself behind a young English-speaking woman who looked like a US tourist. Two presumably Puerto Rican women accompanied her. As the first dancer started her performance wearing only a jean and a tank top, the Puerto Rican women started explaining in Spanglish to her foreign guest what bomba was. "We need to learn how to dance it!" said enthusiastically one of the Puerto Ricans, while the foreigner confusedly eyed her and inquired what the dance was. "It's history, like el güiro, remember el güiro?"[41] said the first Puerto Rican, while the US woman asked if in bomba they used *el* güiro, excited of finally understanding. "No", doubtfully, said the local girls as if not knowing how to explain themselves. One of them searched the Internet for a photo of a traditional soberao and a dancer wearing the folkloric dress. The American woman understood this, exclaiming in awe, "oh, that's the thing with the thing-y in the hair!" mimicking a turban on top of her head. The woman nodded eagerly.

The struggle of the locals to explain what bomba is to the tourist even though there is a performance happening right in front of them struck me as an interesting situation. What that dancer —and most of the rest of the participants— was doing could be easily read by Puerto Ricans as bomba, but could not be *explained* by them. Due to the recent popularity of

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41 The güiro is a musical instrument typically used in "jíbaro" (peasant) genres.

this type of bombazos in the Island, it is possible for locals to identify other signs as bomba in spite of the missing bomba skirt. For the two Puerto Rican women, things like the drums, the music, the movements of the dancers, the way that the space is arranged, and even the name of the group that organizes the activity —Doña Caridad Brenes de Cepeda School— points to the performance tradition.

The tourist, however, cannot recognize what it all is, but not because she does not know what bomba is. She certainly seems familiar with Puerto Rican folklore, since she knows what a güiro is and later recognizes the performance as "the thing with the turbans". Rather, her confusion is explained by the absentee of the iconic attires that female folkloric performers traditionally wear and that include turbans and white, long-sleeved dresses with ruffled-styled skirts cinched at the waist. These outfits are used in government-sponsored promotions for all types of purposes: from the Tourism Company advertisements (Figure 3) where they state that "big skirts and bold colors are part of bomba and plena dancing attire"[42], to articles announcements of the University of Puerto Rico's *cultural agenda* (Figure 4) where feminine bodies clothed with the folkloric attires are featured.[43] After all, in Puerto Rico, as Abadía-Rexach comments, "decir bomba es sinónimo de folclor" (2015, p. 231).

[42] Caption found at the foot of a woman with a folkloric dress dancing during the Fiestas de la Calle San Sebastián in Old San Juan. Learning the Dances of Puerto Rico, *Discover Puerto Rico*. Retrieved from http://www.discoverpuertorico.com/article/learning-dances-puerto-rico.
[43] Encuentro de Ballets Folklóricos en el Teatro UPR (marzo, 2019), UPRRP. Retrieved from http://www.uprrp.edu/?p=19315

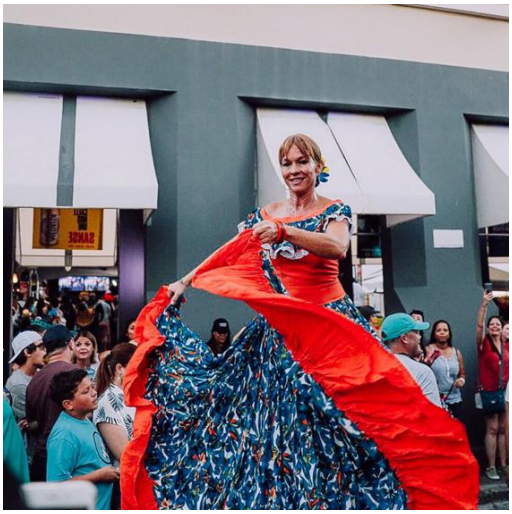

Figure 3: photo used in “Discover Puerto Rico”, Tourism Company’s website.

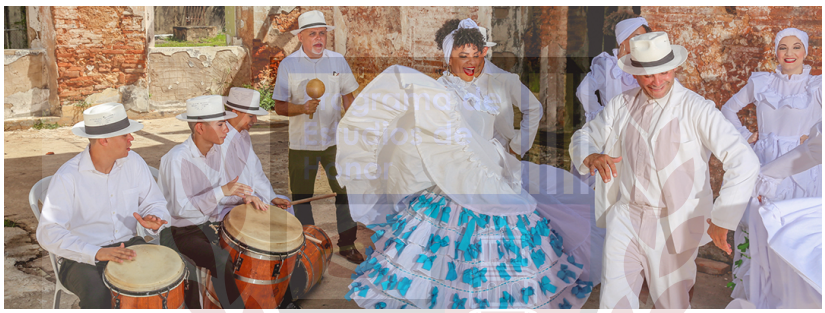

Figure 4: photo used in the University of Puerto Rico’s website.

This situation doubly unveils the major effects that the traditional scripts have over the notions of culture and race. On the one hand, they influence on how an outsider of the nation understands bomba. Her understanding is informed by the definition given by the government website “Discover Puerto Rico” that describes it, as a “*contagious* dance inspired by Puerto Rico’s African *roots*”[44]. On the other hand, they hinder the task for groups to contest them, considering that they are expected by tourists—and locals—to engage in activities that symbolize authentic blackness.

[44] My emphasis. The definition given is for *bomba y plena* and accounts for the two performances as one, an attitude common in certain spaces, like in the *Festival de Bomba y Plena* in Hatillo in October 2018. In some activities, including the one mentioned here, bomba is relegated to a second place, with very little representation. Music and Dance, *Discover Puerto Rico*. Retrieved from https://www.discoverpuertorico.com/island/music-dance

The conceptions of blackness as an everlasting essence of black and Caribbean bodies collide with what the Doña Caridad Brenes de Cepeda School of Bomba and Plena are trying to do. In their bombazos, they make some interventions between songs to explain the history of bomba and to promote it as an "espacio de apertura y como herramienta de aprendizaje cultural" (Abadía, 2015, p. 14), as they constantly do. However, due to how this event differentiates from the State-sponsored scripts that the tourists manage, manifestations like the one mentioned before can occur as well as some other similar attitudes. Comparable to this situation, one could mention the US man interrupting a leader figure of the school in that bombazo as she explained the nature of bomba by yelling "Shut up and dance!" from the public.

These situations presented above show different instances, both in BombAeróbicos and in other activities that I attended as part of my fieldwork, where bomba became the place for interplay with folklore and modern everyday life, as well as a locus for scripts of race, and particularly of blackness, to be used. It is worth mentioning, however, that the coexisting meanings of bomba do not manifest only in the events described and analyzed here. In spaces like El Hangar, I witnessed how bomba can have political purposes, and in Taller Tambuyé's end of the semester activity, I observed how it operates as a social fabric that creates and cohere a community. I will revisit that topic later on.

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Uses of Bomba in the Everydayness

In this next section, I expand on the different purposes that bomba serves among the different activities I observed. My emphasis is on the particularities of BombAeróbicos as an entrepreneurship project developed through accommodations and opposition with another regulatory entity —MCS— besides the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture. I also compare the use of the bomba scripts in other activities where public sponsorship is received. I do this

with the intention of contrasting the degree of flexibility or rigidity that private financial support might have vis-à-vis State funding.

Furthermore, I explore other functions that bomba has nowadays besides exercising and business. I focus on instances where bomba would be deployed in a folkloric manner like in the 8th Festival of Bomba and Plena in Hatillo and in the Doña Caridad Brenes de Cepeda School bombazos; bomba as an instrument of social cohesion for groups like Taller Tambuyé, and bomba as a site for political contestation like in the El Gándul community. Finally, I explore the concept of "musical pathway" in contrast to "community", as a more precise term to describe BombAeróbicos. These categories are not mutually exclusive; rather, there are cases were there could be a back-and-forth between two or more categories, or rather a coexistence of elements of both.

Corporate sponsorship in BombAeróbicos: negotiations and contestations. The Institute of Puerto Rican Culture has been responsible for over six decades of "shaping and disseminating an official view of what constituted Puerto Rican culture" (Dávila, 1997, p. 60), as well as enforcing the government-sponsored racial scripts (Godreau, 2015). Specifically, the ICP denominates bomba as part of the nation's cultural heritage, thus recognizing it as an art and promoting the creation of certain folkloric groups (Abadía-Rexach, 2015, p. 91). However, in recent years and due to the economic crisis that the local government has undergone along with the imposition of the Financial Oversight and Management Board by the federal government, the ICP has seen its budget getting more and more constrained. In 2017, 36 of its projects stopped receiving special government funding and started drawing from the ICP's global budget. Its current director, Carlos Ruiz Cortés, recognized the negative effects that this would have in the ICP's cultural entities and invited them to "reinvent themselves and keep working" (Fullana Acosta, 2017, my translation).

Furthermore, in 2018, resources for two government agencies –the ICP and the Musical Arts Corporation—were consolidated, thus limiting the finances for its cultural agenda even more.

By examining one of the ICP's Instagram—its username is @culturalpr[45]—I was able to recognize that most of its posts and daily stories[46] were promotions for activities organized by other entities, usually private ones. For approximately three weeks (from November 26th to December 1st and from December 5th to December 17th), I observed their Instagram stories to discern what is the State sponsoring. From the 64 unique stories I was able to recover, more than half (54.6% [35]) were promotions for cultural activities organized by private businesses, such as restaurants, bars, bookstores, and hotels. From the rest of the posts, 14 of them (21.8%) were promotions for municipal festivals like the Christmas Festival at Yauco and the "Al Fresco" Festival in Caguas. Meanwhile, the other 14 (21.8%) were posts from ICP projects like the Puerto Rico Museum of Art and the National Foundation for Popular Culture. Of these last 14, only four (6% of the posts) carried the ICP official logo. From the total of daily stories, only 3 (4%) were explicitly about bomba[47], —or included an itinerary with at least one bomba presentation— which is surprising given the genre's popularity during Christmas.

Even though this is not representative of the ICP's cultural agenda, it does point to a shift on its policy. The ICP has transitioned from being the main engine and producer of official Puerto Rican culture, to becoming essentiality a cultural promoter with little investment. What happens, then, to bomba, its scripts and the racial hierarchies they

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45 The ICP has, to my knowledge, two official Instagram accounts: one under the username @icp.pr and the name Instituto de Cultura PR, and the one mentioned here, which promotes itself as the cultural agenda of the Institute. It is the second one, however, the one with the most posts (at the moment of writing the thesis it almost doubled the posts from the first Instagram), as well as has over 400 followers more.

46 Instagram stories are "a feature that lets users post photos and videos that vanish after 24 hours" (Read, 2016).

47 Of these three events, two private activities (a bombazo in a bar and bomba classes in a school) and one public (a bombazo in a Río Piedras activity).

engender, if the institution in charge of upholding its position in Puerto Rican culture is mostly promoting other activities or merely operating as a passive vehicle of communication? What are the implications of using bomba, a folkloric Afro-Puerto Rican performance, to build a business like it is already happening by bars, restaurants, folkloric schools, or even bomba exercises? Can it result in subversion or empowerment? I do not pretend to fully address these questions. However, my observations and analysis of BombAeróbicos dynamics can contribute to their discussions.

In the hemispheric context, we can find multiple cases of Afro-diasporic cultural expressions that have been commercialized and introduced into the global market as a fitness alternative. One example of this is capoeira, which, after being originated by African slaves in Brazil during the sixteenth century, became a Brazilian national stamp and a device to narrate the African heritage during the country's nation-building project. Robitaille (2014) argues that capoeira's global marketing shifted from its original meanings, thus recontextualizing it as an exercise rather than an illegal practice. Another example of Afro-diasporic fitnessing is GarigunaRobics, an aerobics-style workout infused with Garifuna musical genres and dance techniques launched in 2018 by Arnol Guity Martínez in New York (Martínez, 2019)[48].

BombAeróbicos serve as a fitnessing example of a folklorized, Afro-Diaporic rhythms in Puerto Rico. Nonetheless, this modality of bomba stands between both cases of capoeira and GarifunaRobics in the sense that BombAeróbicos are sponsored and advertised by a private sector –MCS— like capoeira, but are an activity created by a self-managed group without global outreach, like GarifunaRobics. Also, just as the recontextualization and new meanings of capoeira have been at the center of discussions, the NPRBM in general has

[48] The Garifuna is an ethnic, Afro-descendant group that settled mostly in Central America after being uprooted and exiling in 1635 in St. Vincent in the Caribbean (Martínez, 2018).

provoked a variety of discussions, particularly from more conservative sectors that consider this movement unauthentic.

Bárbara Abadía-Rexach comments on the frictions produced by the activities organized by the NPRBM, arguing that these fights respond to the "desigualdad del género en relación con otras músicas puertorriqueñas" and result in a constant battle of who is legitimate enough to perform bomba, without realizing the visibility and outreach that different activities have (2015, p. 230). Some of the reasons for the broader social group to question the gesta cultural that groups like Taller Tamboricua do have to do with notions of authenticity, which tends to be subtracted by not fitting into the traditional bomba scripts (being phenotypically black and performing non-traditionally). Part of not assuming the scripts include being sponsored by non-governmental institutions, like MCS. As Dávila argues, the delegitimation of new cultural practices as commercial "serves to limit their influence on dominant conceptions of identity" (1997, p. 217), which could explain why it becomes virtually impossible for groups like Taller Tamboricua to receive State funding.

Despite prompting perceptions of being illegitimate, the relation between the health insurance company and Taller Tamboricua certainly raises questions about how does the group's mission of expanding the traditional, State-sponsored scripts of bomba changes when undergoing MCS's politics. MCS describes the program that includes BombAeróbicos, "Salud Paso a Paso", as an agenda of offerings of diverse fitness classes and talks about nutrition and health-related topics. Taller Tamboricua had been offering their dance-exercise classes even before the MCS sponsorship (since 1998), for they created this bomba modality as part of their much broader realm of activities. Even though I cannot pinpoint at what exact moment the health insurance company started funding exercise sessions offered by the NPRBM group, I can tell that their business relationship goes back to at least 2013. "Salud Paso a Paso" is promoted as one of the benefits of the healthcare plan: the bomba exercises

are, therefore, a way for a private company to increase its marketing and appeal to a broader audience.

During my participation of BombAeróbicos, I could witness the negotiations and tensions that aroused between the self-managed group and its private sponsors. The most latent issue was the calendar. MCS decided the place and the time where BombAeróbicos were to be offered, which created certain challenges. The semesters, as Taller Tamboricua calls them, took long pauses—for example, the class did not meet in December or January—and were offered in a time period that most participants found inconvenient. When some of them voiced their concern, Daniel said that they –Taller Tamboricua—had passed along the message to MCS, but that the company refused to change it. Another way in which MCS had control over the BombAeróbicos was by requiring participants to sign an attendance sheet that included their insurance number. As Daniel stressed in every session, attendance was crucial for the BombAeróbicos to be offered, and a lack of it could result in the program shutting down like it had happened at different cities.

Even though I do not know exactly what limitations MCS established to Taller Tamboricua regarding their gesta cultural during BombAeróbicos, there were instances in which the instructors seemed to take certain liberties of adding some bomba teaching or of modifying the routines, thus subverting the demands imposed by the business relationship. For example, Daniel would quiz us at the beginning of choreography about what type of bomba was being playing. He would also insist on bomba traditions—like saluting the drum—when we created a batey and given the low participation, said that on March he would ask us to bring pashminas[49] so that the movements could resemble more to bomba. This subtle, yet noticeable alteration by the instructors, resembles what Michel de Certeau calls "opposition". For the author, opposition takes place within the oppressor system "blow by

[49] In bombazos it is common to see dancers enter the soberao and perform with a pashmina that accents their piquetes.

blow" (de Certau, 1980), meaning the side on the most disadvantaged side of the power relation moves from one tactical maneuver to another within and against the system (Burton, 1997, p. 50).

Furthermore, what the business relationship ends up producing is precisely what Robitaille points out about capoeira: a recontexualization, thus "unsettling both its relationship to its immediate national settings and its underlying socioeconomic and racial connotations" (2014, p. 230). BombAeróbicos, promoted as a creative exercise alternative by MCS just like yoga and Zumba, seems to unlink bomba of its traditional scripts that narrate dance as a black essence. This dovetails with what Dávila pointed out decades ago, in her analysis of the interaction of culture, politics, and corporate sponsorship in the island, where there had been a cultural turn in advertising and marketing in Puerto Rico that resulted in the marginal groups' feat being "co-opted or folklorized" (1997, p. 178). These processes are the outcomes of advertising tactic sales that seek to "address newer audiences and broaden the consumer base" (Dávila, 1997, p. 175).

For MCS, BombAeróbicos work at two levels: first, they target old people—the demographic sector of fastest growth in Puerto Rico— by the deployment of health-related discourses. Second, they nationalize the industry, adding a Puerto Rican *flavor* to their mission and depicting themselves as "culturally concerned".[50] Regarding this topic, it is noteworthy that the companies that Dávila (1997) examined were characterized for their rejection of romanticized images of folklore and an adoption of representations of modern, everyday life. MCS's use of BombAeróbicos actually proposes a dialogue between both tradition and creative expression. It is precisely that possibility of folklore being used for an everyday activity what is useful for the company's advertising and marketing.

[50] Raquel Z. Rivera (2007) argues that cultural nationalism, no matter who deploys it, let it be the State or the media industry, always celebrates selective aspects while suppressing others.

As a result, corporations like MCS become alternative channels for Taller Tamboricua to promote the activity as part of their gesta cultural. After all, they are also receiving financial support from the business. MCS corporate sponsorship consequently facilitates Taller Tamboricua's mission of expanding the realms of everyday life where bomba is enjoyed through BombAeróbicos. Thus, an everlasting negotiation between a development of Tamboricua's mission and MCS conditions for their sponsorship takes place, which consists of a continuous expansion and limitation of bomba in the everydayness. As Michel Foucault (1978) qualifies, "there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case […] by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations" (p. 96). Thus, in the power relation between MCS and Taller Tamboricua sealed by their business contract, there are arrays of ways in which the party with less power (Taller Tamboricua) can resist or subvert certain demanded aspects of the party with more power (MCS).

Hence, independently of the limitations that the business relation can create for bomba, there are multiple ways through which Taller Tamboricua can still enlarge the traditional scripts. One example of this would be the own agency of the creative, entrepreneurship project that Tamboricua route itself onto. As Lillian Guerra (1998) comments on the cultural manifestations of Puerto Rico's popular class during the first half of the 20th century:

> Creative expression [does] not serve simply to codify values or articulate resistance […] Creative expression [allows] participants to carve out spontaneous chambers in diverse settings for intellectual exchange, debates and the legislation of ideas that might aptly be called "folkloric politics" (p. 129).

The expansion of the scripts, therefore, is not a linear process: spontaneity plays a major role on Tamboricua's feat. However, spontaneity, like any manifestation with intentions of reaching broader audiences, finds itself negotiating its spaces. In some

occasions, this means compromising on some aspects in order to reach a deeper, more meaningful goal. After all, "most groups are forced to rely on nongovernmental funders to support the popular-entertainment aspect of their activities" (Dávila, 1997, p. 206).

Furthermore, BombAeróbicos, despite its restrictions, functions as a way to present the scripts of blackness in fluid, dynamic ways, not by invisibilizing it, but by allowing for more ways of imagining race outside discourses of authenticity. Given that bomba is associated with black bodies, and that skin color is a primary signifier for claims of black authenticity (E.P. Johnson, 2003), the intrinsic racism in the corporate world might not allow traditional, folkloric groups to engage in their way of *doing culture*. However, Taller Tamboricua's various racial phenotypes, as well as their capitalization on health concern discourses, let them engage less difficultly in these relations with MCS. Consequently, Taller Tamboricua and other groups from the NPRBM gain access to much-needed funding that allows them to perform bomba and its racial scripts in diverse manners. As E.P. Johnson points out, "blackness is not something one necessarily wears on the outside but something more ephemeral and processual—a performative that calls attention to the slippages among biology, culture, ideology, and politics" (2003, p. 27). Thus, BombAeróbicos mission of exposing people to experience bomba as part of their everyday lives in creative ways and non-traditional manners.

This phenomenon is not new in the Caribbean. Melisa Blanco-Borelli (2015, p. 33) identifies in Cuba, where "certain mulaticized bodies (depending on their phenotype and how closely they approximated whiteness) could move through varying spaces of (ambiguous) racial identity and domesticity". Their phenotype, then, allowed them to be positioned as women with "a certain degree of access". This is precisely what occurs in Puerto Rico, where one might argue that the gesta cultural that the NPRBM is embodying is creating corporate bridges that might have not been possible with other groups, such as those that rigidly follow

the State-sponsored scripts. Furthermore, as Abadía-Rexach explains, "el uso de la bomba para la creación de talleres educativos rompe drásticamente con la minusvaloración del sujeto Negro en términos de su inteligencia y prestigio. Ahora, es el Negro el educador y no el personaje victimizado e invisibilizado." (2015, p. 133).

Moreover, as John L. Jackson suggests, "no behavioral gesture is going to allow unproblematized access to Black authenticity" (p. 185). Therefore, any creative deployment of blackness is expected to be scrutinized by certain sectors of the broader social group.

Another way in which BombAeróbicos relation with MCS expands the scripts of bomba and their assigned slots is through Elia Cortés's achievements into becoming a known gestora cultural. Decades ago, women were not traditionally treated as folklore organizers in the country. In words of Arlene Dávila, due to not having reached the prominence of male promoters, female gestoras had not "been able to establish the same authority in their respective regions nor the personal relations that their male counterparts have established with local directors" (1997, p. 83). For that reasons, the ability of these groups to access these spaces remains remarkable.

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Bomba as a folkloric device in contemporary settings. There are some events, like the 8th Bomba and Plena Festival that testify to processes where the cultural, State-sponsored scripts are undertaken and reproduced. This festival took place during the third weekend of October 2018 in the town square of Hatillo. It characterized itself for a predominance of plena shows rather than bomba and for hosting around 20 to 30 kiosks that sold traditional foods, handcrafted objects, and clothes with Puerto Rican cultural symbols. While in Puerto Rico craftsmanship is usually related to the jíbaro, due to the inextricable relation of bomba and plena to African "heritage", most tables included two or three items that represented blackness. Examples of these expressions were a painting of a bomba dancer among a lot of

Quixote's portraits and Taínos cemíes, and three black rag dolls located at the middle of a bunch of white dolls.

Despite this activity not being sponsored by the ICP, the Hatillo municipal government funded it. The deployment of la gran familia puertorriqueña symbols in the event, even though it was dedicated to Afro-Puerto Rican rhythms, shows the imbrications of what Balibar and Wallersetin (1991) call the "fictive ethnicity", or the ethnic base that is thought of as natural of the community in order to craft social cohesion (p. 96). The festival reproduced institutionalized understandings of African heritage, where blackness is reduced to "the realm of music, dance, and kinesthetic sensibilities" (Godreau, 2015, p. 189).

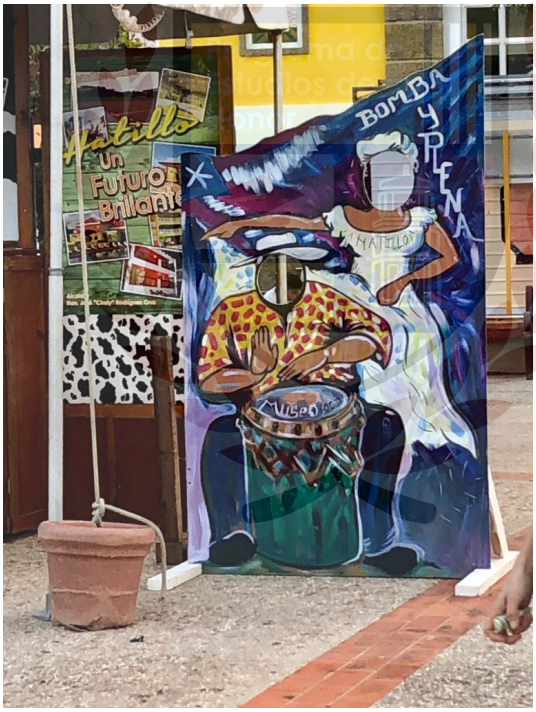

Figure 5: Face-cut out picture stand at the Bomba and Plena Festival in Hatillo

These scripts of blackness, and their presence in the collective's imageries become evident when even Afro-Puerto Rican elements were not popular, to say the least, in Afro-Puerto Rican activities like the festival in Hatillo. For example, there was an awkwardly located face-cut out picture stand where two people could pose as a bomba drummer and dancer (Figure 5). Yet, I never saw anyone use it while I stood there for about an hour

waiting for the music show to start. Also, there were several t-shirts with phrases like África habla en mí[51] that were on the back of a kiosk rack.

Another events where I witnessed the use and reproduction of the scripts were at the Magia de los Tambores[52], periodic bombazos organized by the Doña Caridad Brenes de Cepeda School of Bomba and Plena. I attended two of these activities in December 2018: one in Plaza de Armas, Old San Juan, and another one in Plaza Antonia Quiñones, Condado.

The use of bomba in these activities is, on the one hand, playing the folkloric scripts, since the name of the school itself is inherently linked in Puerto Rican's imaginary to folkloric expressions of the rhythm, not to mention the Cepeda's kinship brand. This became evident when, while waiting for the bombazo to start in Condado, an old, white man asked me who was going to perform. When I told him that it was Doña Caridad Brenes School, he looked confused, as in not recognizing the name. He asked me again, and when I told him the full name—Caridad Brenes de Cepeda—he nodded understandingly, saying "aah, de bomba"[53]. Thus, the last name Cepeda, as well as Ayala, has come to be signified in Puerto Rico as folklore for its affiliation to the ICP since the 1970s and its own brand and prestige, even though Doña Caridad Brenes was a folklorist herself. It is also worth mentioning that at least the bombazo at Condado had the municipal government sponsorship, which could have contributed to the deployment of tradition.

Another instance where the playing of the traditional scripts was palpable was when, after opening the batey to any bailador or bailadora from the public, a black woman entered the soberao. Most of the performers up to that moment ranged closer to the white end of the racial spectrum, and only a handful of them were wearing bomba skirts and a photographer was taking pictures of them from the distance. When the black woman entered the batey

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51 "Africa speaks on me".
52 "The Magic of the Drums".
53 "Oh, a bomba activity".

wearing a bomba skirt, she did so majestically, making most people pay attention to her movements; this included the photographer, who rushed to the woman and took a photo kneeling right on front of her.

My comment on this is not to take credit off the dancer or essentialize special dancing techniques to her body: she genuinely entered the batey with noticeably much more energy than the rest, provoking an intense reaction in the public, a gesture similar in some way to the rush of the photographer. However, that act of the photographer of moving to take pictures of her from up close —and then, when finished, asking her to pose for another photo while holding up her skirt—connotes a particular representation of bomba being pursued for a wider external public. Even though the photographer did take pictures of some women dancing without skirts, the only time I saw him ask someone for a picture after the person had left the soberao was when he reached out to the black woman. This assertion of depicting bomba as it traditionally has been portrayed—evoking its African origins—can be understood as an acceptance of the folkloric scripts.

On the other hand, the event itself connotes a different approach to bomba. The school's performance in public spaces and in more informal manners is similar to the tasks undertaken by groups like Taller Tamboricua of opening up the possibilities of imagining bomba and allowing the public to appreciate it in everyday spaces. In the words of Abadía-Rexach, "a través de presentaciones públicas fuera del batey, se media para hacer hincapié en que el ritmo Negro es capaz de ganar y generar adeptos fuera de la población Afro descendiente" (2015, p. 133).

La Magia de los Tambores represents also a political gesture, given that both these bombazos, used previously as examples, took place in spaces characterized as tourist sites and high-class residences. The moderators made interventions between songs to mention how, during many centuries, enslaved Africans walked those streets, as well as how they

erected many of our historical buildings. They, too, added remarks regarding the occupying of the space by the enslaved like "si sintieron una brisa pasando por la plaza, fueron los espíritus de nuestros ancestros escapándose hacia Vacía Talega".[54] Hence, the event and its informative interferences had a didactic element that introduced marginalized narratives of the Afro-Puerto Rican history.

* * *

Bomba as an instrument of social cohesion and as a political resistance. Another aspect worth discussing is the function of bomba as an adhesive for community expression. I attended two events where this was accentuated: in Tírate un Piquete, the closing of Taller Tambuyé's semester during December 2018, and in Retumba el Gandúl, a bombazo in El Hangar, a community center in Santurce during November of the same year.

I learned about Taller Tambuyé's activity as a Facebook event that claimed to be open for "friends and family of Taller Tambuyé". It had a GPS pin for people to follow to the meeting, which was held in Trujillo Alto. I did not notice it was in a private residence until my friend and I were already there. As we walked towards the terrace of the house, we could hear salsa music being played and see several women sitting in plastic chairs talking and drinking Medalla beers. Since there was no bomba being played and it was evidently a close activity, my friend Gerardo and I decided it would be best to leave. As we were turning around, a woman, whom I later learned was a friend of Gerardo and a bomba instructor for Tambuyé—and to whom I will refer as Penelope—shouted his name and started wondering how and why we were there. As I explained to her my mistake of thinking it was a public activity, she confirmed that the bombazo was sort of private and that bomba would not be played until later. However, before we left, I was able to talk to her about her ideas of bomba and its function in Tambuyé.

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[54] "If you felt a breeze cutting through the town square, those were the spirits of our ancestors escaping to Vacía Talega".

Among all the aspects Penelope remarked, the one that was continuously overlexicated was that it allowed for the group to create a *family*. She mentioned that, just like during the slavery period when enslaved Africans used bomba as an act of release and enjoyment, it worked the same way for the group. Furthermore, she commented on the nature of the event to be a more relaxed setting than what I would have expected, since it was their outlet from their own staging.

The remark on the relax setting seemed to be an element present in the bombazo of El Hangar. Since that first moment we—my friend Federico and I— entered the community center, people were looking at us oddly. The activity was promoted as public on their Facebook event as a bombazo in response to the inaction of Puerto Rico's government toward the toll of dead women due to gender violence.[55] However, there appeared to be some sort of expectation that only known people or individuals that frequented the space would come. When we got to the community center, the majority of the people there were phenotypically closer to the black end of the racial spectrum and everyone was already engaged in conversation with someone else; they were also eyeing us curiously as if we were out of place. This could have been because Federico and I are closer to the white end of the spectrum and were not talking to anyone just yet, which made us stand out.

Regardless of our condition as outsiders, we stayed and waited for the bombazo to begin. A quick look around told me this would be a much more different event to the ones I had assisted: for starters, there was a Yoruba altar displaying black Puerto Rican flags, a machete, the phrase "Nos tenemos ache"[56], and candles with names written on them. When we came close to it, we saw they were the names of each dead woman due to gender violence

[55] For more on this discussion, consult Maribel Hernández Pérez's article "Las 23 mujeres asesinadas por sus parejas" (2018).
[56] According to Conexión Cubana's santería, ache can refer to blessing. Thus, a possible translation could be "We are blessed". This could be related to the grieving ambiance of the activity.

in 2018. There were also two women crying and consoling each other; we overheard them talk about how that same day a man from the community had died. After about half an hour there, more people were arriving and we fairly mixed ourselves among the crowd. We were offered food from the meal that the organizers were preparing and greeted some people that we knew form the university, including professors and students. We could also recognize some distinguished figures from left-oriented political movements, like people that belong to the Colectiva Feminista en Construcción, the Plena Combativa, and the Movimiento Estudiantil.[57]

Despite the emotional weight of the topics being discussed—some more political, others more sentimental— and of a noticeable and overwhelming grieving ambiance, the atmosphere became much more lighter once the barriles started to play. The bombazo per se took place inside of a sort of zinc-made barnyard. We sat on the floor, where most spectators located themselves. There were no formalities: the drums started to "repicar"[58] and a couple of women stood up to dance without skirts. After two more dancers performed in the soberao, one of the organizers intervened, saying that this bombazo was dedicated to the fatal victims of gender violence, and with the purpose, also of "exponer la bomba a todos *los de afuera* que no necesariamente la conocen *como nosotros*".[59]

Bomba, in this scenery, more than an exercising alternative or an entrepreneurism project, becomes central in the formation and (re)formation of social groups. In the case of Taller Tambuyé's party, the people in the group met each other and created social bonds *because* of their mutual interest in the genre. In Repica El Gandúl, the groups already existed—the El Gándul community, members from the Colectiva Feminista, from the

[57] These groups are associated to feminist, anti-colonialist, and education-defending ideologies, among others.
[58] To play bomba.
[59] "Exposing bomba to *everyone from the outside* that doesn't know it like *we* do". My emphasis.

Movimiento Estudiantil, and so on[60]—, but they seemed to have found bomba useful to share their common political reclaims. As a result, and as Georgina Born (2011) argues, music can become the center of a multiplicity of human relations, not only as the product of these relations (in the case of Tambuyé), but as a resignifier of pre-existing social connections (like in El Hangar). In her words, "musical performance is not only entangled in wider social identity formation, but has the capacity to reconfigure or catalyze those formations" (Born, 2011, p. 380). Consequently, these two cases respond to Kay Shelemay's concept of musical community that represents "a collective constructed through and sustained by musical processes and/or performances" (2011, p. 364).

The previous discussion of bomba and community events raises the question, by comparison, as to whether the BombAeróbicos group at Parque Lineal is a musical community. Furthermore, we might ask if the group can conform a concentric circle of community with MCS being in the fringe. Even though this would seem as an easily answerable inquiry—since, after all, they are organized by Taller Tamboricua, a musical community itself—I believe the issue if far more complex. The people who participate in BombAeróbicos have some affinities: they belong to the same gender and age group and they have an interest in fitness. However, these participants, at the time I conducted my ethnographic work, seemed more free flowing in terms of group cohesion: they appeared to only see each other in the afternoons of certain days to exercise, not always attended the BombAeróbicos sessions, and only communicated through the WhatsApp group to let everyone know if they would be arriving late. Part of what Shelemay considers crucial for the presence of a musical community is the "real-time social relationships", as well as the "aware[ness] of a connection among themselves" (2011, p. 364-365). She draws from

[60] The adherence to one group does not exclude a person from belonging to another. In fact, because of the shared political interests, it is very common for one person to participate actively in two or more groups.

Anderson's notion of communities as not false or genuine, but as imagined as a "deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson, 1983, p. 7).

Given the strong distinctions that are palpable between the BombAeróbicos and the other bomba groups mentioned here, I cannot assert that the Parque Lineal's group functions as a musical community. Rather, I would like to offer a concept that I believe best describes the participant's dynamics: Ruth Finnegan's "musical pathways" (2013). This concept has not been used extensively in academic ventures because is more suited to single locations; however, due to the Parque Lineal's centrality for this group, I consider it appropriate in this case. Finnegan describes musical pathways as:

> one of the ways in which people within an urban environment organise their lives so as to manage, on the one hand, the heterogeneity and multiplicity of relationships characteristic of many aspects of modern society, and, on the other, that sense of both predictable familiarity and personally controlled meaning that is also part of human life (p. 325).

This concept, I believe, allows for a nuanced understanding of the group, given the dynamics I observed among the participants. On the one hand, the women that participate of BombAeróbicos in Bayamón lead complex urban lives, which at some point limited their regular participation. In some occasions, they arrived late because they said they were dropping off their grandchildren, and in other occasions they brought them along, which meant they spent part of the class chasing them or looking after them.

On the other hand, I consider they did felt some familiarity among themselves. The participants greeted each other with cheek kisses, chatted while dance-exercising, made jokes with the instructors and took photos while hugging at the end of the sessions, not to mention they would say good morning almost every morning through the WhatsApp chat. Thus, the BombAeróbicos sessions, even though short and not always possible, were highly amicable

and predictable.

I also consider Finnegan's concept appropriate since it does not deny the possibility of the group members to both develop a bond with each other and expand this bond through their actions. Thus, there is possibility that they these connections might evolve into a musical community. In this way, BombAeróbicos, besides serving as a financial incoming for Taller Tamboricua as well as a political statement, also uses bomba as a socializing device, which enables the creation of a possible musical community.

Gender and Everydayness in Contemporary Bomba Settings

There have been more than a few instances during my fieldwork were the gendered representations of bomba have become evident. These intersections were palpable on the display of a painting of black female folkloric bomba dancer in an artisan's table in the Festival de Bomba y Plena in Hatillo and in the photographer's rush to take a picture of a black woman wearing a bomba skirt in La Magia de los Tambores in Condado. Additionally, the imbrication of gender was evident in the confusion that the lack of a skirt in la bailadora's outif provoked, as well as in the participants' generalized expectations that Elena would be able to shake her hips in BombAeróbicos. However, what I want to emphasize in this section are some of the instances, particularly in BombAeróbicos, were I observed how the traditional feminine and masculine scripts of blackness assigned to bomba were performed, as well as those instances were they were contested and rewritten.

Considering gender as a performative possibility by which actors can use their bodies to assert agency, I attend specifically how these deployments of tradition can simultaneously reproduce and challenge essentialist notions of blackness and femininity through performances that (de)construct hegemonic, patriarchal patterns. Moreover, I argue that the ways in which participants embody the scripts of black femininity can also bestow on them additional meanings. Thus, I believe that they assume and expand the limits of the scripts,

hence transiting through different possibilities.

It is worth mentioning at this point what are the traditional gendered scripts of bomba in order to evaluate their use and disuse. According to Carlos Álamo-Pastrana, bomba "tends toward a gendered division of musical labor in which men constitute the majority of the musicians while women are mostly singers" (2009, p. 584). In its beginnings, men also were the ones that danced it. Throughout time, women started to join bomba, although in limited roles. Due to the variability of bomba genres around the Island, it is hard to generalize on what spaces were relegated to women, although there is consensus in the academic community that traditionally the female roles consisted of either singing or dancing, or both. However, both practices are executed in different, gendered ways, thus making the female and male experience different. In folkloric bomba, playing the drums kept historically being a masculine task. For Abadía-Rexach (2015), this means that women have had a limited role in the performance even if they can dance, since they have to confront the musicians and the drums that challenge her and mark the time for her to dance. Another aspect that should be highlighted is the centrality of the bomba skirt. Its use is related to notions of authenticity and its practice is imbedded in such a way that even arm piquetes can be called faldeo even when the skirt itself is absent.

For the sake of introducing my argument in a more organized manner, I will locate the diverse activities to which I attended in a spectrum of malleability of the scripts, where those that allowed for more flexibility for the participants to transit through the dichotomous gendered scripts would be found in one side, and those were participants were expected to follow them according to folklore and tradition would be placed on the other. This range fluctuates, for, as we will see in the next pages, there were events were both attitudes collided.

Gendered scripts in BombAeróbicos. The expansion and the reproduction of the gendered

scripts of bomba was also palpable in BombAeróbicos. As mentioned before, Héctor and Víctor would alternate as the primos, while Daniel would serve as the dancing instructor. The participants, whom would copy Daniel's moves, were old women over 50 years old. This phenomenon does not seem to be new: professors and students from universities in the US have told me that this also occurs in bomba groups in Boston and San Francisco. However, this was the first time I had seen this dynamic in any modality of bomba in the Island.

In BombAeróbicos, Daniel would shake his shoulders, move his hips, and do a running motion that would make the buttocks and tights wiggle. Both men and women traditionally perform these movements when entering the batey. However, they are executed in a different manner: the fluidity with which they are made changes. Women's movements are traditionally depicted as more sensual and fluid, while men's dance moves are presented more sharp and with more strength. Even though it was not entirely obvious at first, after a number of sessions I could see that Daniel was performing feminine bomba movements according to the traditional scripts. Two aspects highlighted this process: his piquetes done through the faldeo with an imaginary skirt—which were the movements executed often—and the only male participant performance I was able to witness during my visits.

José, a trigueño old man, arrived one day to the BombAeróbicos and asked what he had to do to participate of the session. After signing the record sheet, he located himself way on the back, far away from all the other participants. The women were eyeing him shyly, probably weirded out by his presence or rather fascinated by it, just like me. He was positioned in a way that made it hard to look at him. Looking at him meant rotating one's full torso to the back of the court. In the few occasions I did see him, I could notice he was modifying Daniel's movements. When Daniel would put his fists in his hips as if he were holding the bomba skirt while rhythmically shrugging his shoulders, José would extend his arms to their sides without holding the imaginary skirt, thus changing Daniel's move and

avoiding the appearance of using a skirt -albeit imaginary. Another feminine movement that he was altering was the hip thrusts: he would not do the rotations completely and would perform them out of rhythm. It is likely that he felt uncomfortable with my unusual stare, for he moved even further away after a few of my attempts to look at him.

Regarding gender, BombAeróbicos could be located at the center of our spectrum. On the one hand, its practices represent an expansion of the scripts in the sense that the person teaching the class is a man performing movements traditionally ascribed to women. Given the woman is "considered the repository par excellence of negroid folklore" (Godreau, 2003), the fact that a man is performing and teaching these moves allows for a re-write of the scripts. Although one might argue that there is something intrinsically problematic with a man performing feminine movements and teaching them to other women—as if he were "appropriating" them—Daniel's and José's executions, as well as the women's performances, were challenging the weakness connected to dance and femininity (Daly, 1988).

I see this happening for two reasons. First, Daniel's performance of feminine movements as strong or aerobic allows for men like José to perform these scripts too. Of course, José's performance seems to show reluctance to do so. However, in BombAeróbicos videos that I have seen, there were men who were evidently more comfortable with the execution of feminine bomba steps. Thus, while the folkloric ideas of blackness tend to consider dance as a feminine action, the masculine incurrences expand the traditional script.

Another way in which those understandings of movement as feminine are contested is through the making of the performed feminine movements into more aerobic—that is, making them more clear-cut or less fluid. The fact that BombAeróbicos dispenses of the use of the skirt makes visible the strength that is necessary to dance bomba. Images of women as weak and dance as an activity that lacks strength are contested in these spaces. Even though movements are hardened in order to make them "aerobic enough", the degree to which this is

done does not alter the basic choreography of bomba in a way that is not recognizable. Thus, more than making it more robust, the removal of the skirt actually makes visible the vigor that is required to dance Bomba. The BombAeróbicos choreography, therefore, emphasizes strength in women.

On the other hand, BombAeróbicos also limit the scripts, or rather stick to the traditional, gendered understandings of bomba, in the sense that it is a man who still plays the drums during the dancing. Even though women's gender roles have evolved (Álamo-Pastrana, 2009), Taller Tamboricua maintains the tradition of men as the primos. In this aspect, BombAeróbicos are less flexible and do not seem to allow for a transit through this particular script.

Another way in which it is possible to see how pervasive the rigidity of the binary can be is in José's reluctance to be seen performing. Even though my observing was awkward and that his hiding could relate more to an introverted personality, it is also plausible that he was sort of ashamed or self-conscious of the feminine movements he was performing. This observation could be supported on the fact that José never returned for another session of BombAeróbicos during my participation. An issue of how these movements are perceived by those who participate is unveiled here. Although the little evidence I have does not allow me to provide for much on this topic, there is certainly fertile ground here to research how do the multiple audiences that consume them receive these new creative practices. As Sarah Cohen (1993) notices, popular music scholars tend to deconstruct the meaning of musical texts—and I would add of performative texts—but the question "'meaning for whom?'" is usually neglected (p. 126).

Gendered scripts in El Hangar. The event Repica el Gandúl was probably the space that allowed for more flexibility in the dichotomous gendered scripts of bomba due to its nature as a feminist activity. In its batey, all the drummers were women, as well as two more

that were playing the "cuá"[61] and a maraca. Moreover, despite the fact that most of the people that performed in the soberao were women, two men danced bomba, which was very peculiar, since in the other bombazos I had attended the batey was a space reserved for feminine performances.

There are two main aspects I would like to draw attention to: one regarding the female performances and another one concerning the male presentations. During the first half of the bomba session in El Hangar, around five different women saluted the prima and danced in the soberao*;* some of them did so in more than one occasion. Of these five women, three were closer to the black end of the spectrum, while two approximated themselves closely to the white end. I noticed that the public's reception—in terms of applause and cheering—seemed to be differentiated according to phenotype: the performances of the women with darker skin or curlier hair appeared to be more praised than of women with lighter skin and straighter hair.

As I have pointed out in earlier sections, this kind of observations are not meant to emphasize the endowment of black women's bodies with an essence that makes them better "bombeadoras". Neither am I trying to be unappreciative of any of the women's dances. Rather, what I am pursuing is the understanding of why some of the performances were more acclaimed than others. I can think of three explanations for this; although I do not adhere to one or another, I do consider all of them possible. The inherent ambiguous nature of performance provides for the coexistence of different ways of making sense of this phenomenon.

First, a plausible reason for these black women's performance to have been better received by the spectators has to do with the audience having some sort of particular affinity to them. My friend Federico and I were able to recognize two of the black bailadoras as

[61] "Cuás" are a percussion instrument that marks the rhythm.

spokespersons for afro-feminist movements in the country. Their notoriety within some circles, like the one were we found ourselves into at the moment, could have resulted in the audience recognizing them and supporting their performance with more eagerness than the others.

A second explanation could be that the audience was reacting differently to the black women's performances because their performances were in fact distinctive from the "jabá"[62] or "trigueña" female performances. The three women's movements were executed with an evident strength, slowness, and seriousness that indicated a lot of emotion. For José Peña Aguayo (2015), this passionate seriousness results from the "vía de reivindicación y activismo que presta a la mujer la dialéctica baile-tambor de la controversia" (p. 59). On the other hand, the two whiter women performed with more joy, smiling throughout their presentation and executing faster piquetes. The differentiated dances could respond to diverse interpretations of bomba performance by the bailadoras: some of them could have read it as a fun activity, while others could have found it more solemn. Thus, the deployed feelings that the musical setting could have triggered did not have to be necessarily the same due to different tastes or life experiences. As Alan Merriam (1964) highlights in his discussion of music as symbolic behavior, "meaning in music is not [necessarily] fixed by common consent of those who create or listen to it" (p. 233). The distinct performances could also stem from the following of the gendered scripts of blackness that are generated in bomba. The black performers could be remitting to traditional ways of performing bomba, where more respect for the performance is implemented and a solemn posture is sometimes preferred. The whiter performers that were smiling could be reading bomba as an enjoyable act, thus not engendering it with such intensity.

Finally, another explanation of the differentiated reaction of the public in El Hangar

[62] "Jabá" refers in Puerto Rico to a fair skinned person with curly hair (Duany, 2000).

concerns the audience's expectations and their understandings of what constitutes an *authentic* performance. This means that the cheering for the black women's performances could have been the public reading them as faithful and accurate representations of what bomba is or should be. The tendency to essentialize dancing onto certain bodies follows a pattern in Western societies, where, according to E.P. Johnson, "the attributes of the mystic figure become ontologically fastened to the Black female bodies onto which they were projected" (2003, p. 110). This phenomenon has been well documented in the Caribbean where, according to Melissa Blanco Borelli, "women of color have historically been relegated to mere physicality" (2015). Thus, the public at Repica El Gandúl could have burst into applause since, from their understandings, those three black women were performing according to the expectation.

Regarding the two male performances that I was able to observe, it is important to point out how their movements caused more or less excitement in the audiences that coincided in this event. The first male performer—a young man—entered the soberao executing movements that resembled more traditional female corporealities. He was shaking his hips and shoulders fluidly, using the feminine bomba scripts rather than the masculine. I looked around the public to see how the spectators responded, but everyone kept a neutral face, nodding along to his piquetes and clapping when he was finished. It was as if this was a common occurrence in bombazos of this nature.

After him, a woman entered the soberao; when she left, a second man—a black, robust man— saluted the tambor and started his performance. His movements were very clear and strong and he would vary a lot: from slow, long movements to fast and short piquetes, the man was enjoying the confusion and challenge that his actions were provoking in the prima as he tried to keep up with him. At the end, he performed a series of beats to his chest that further—and successfully—tested the female drum player's ability to maintain the

rhythm. He left the soberao smirking as if he had lost the challenge to the prima and was impressed by her. The prima was laughing too, shaking her head and breathing deeply as if the man's performance had made her tired. After scanning the audience to see their reactions, I found they were very similar to those given to the first male performer, with the exception of my friend, Federico. He looked at me with a mixed look of amusement and shock. "¿Tú viste eso?" he said. "Qué cosa?" I asked him, knowing what he meant but wanting to pressure him to express what was in his mind. "Loca, ¡bailó bien exagerado![63]".

This last situation unveils certain gender and race understandings that are both contested and reproduced in this space. The black man's performance deployed ape-like movements that could indexicalize a reference to the traditional, State-sponsored scripts of blackness where the "negroid culture" represents black people as primitive, hypersexualized, non-rational and almost instinctively animalistic (Godreau, 2003). What the man is embodying is what Brenda Dixon Gottshild calls the "Africanist aesthetic", which is a set of qualities in art and dance associated with black dancing bodies as part of the cultural denial of enslaved Africans in America and the homogenization of lifestyle (2003, p. 15). More than the man's performance being an unknowing action, the performer's movements could be understood, using Federico's word, as "exaggerated", or rather as an overstated attempt to own the scripts and use them under his own terms and for his own purposes. Consequently, my friend's surprise responds to how his own understandings of what bomba is and to the oddity, for him, to see a person appropriate the scripts that have been used to discriminate him and assign him to limited slots.

However, this show of strength and virility also needs to be analyzed in terms of gender. As Peña Aguayo (2015, p. 60) mentions, traditionally, the only authorized to execute

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63 Federico: "Did you see that?"
Me: "Saw what?"
Federico: "Dude, his dance was very exaggerated!".

the barril have been the men. Yet, in the last years, bombeadoras from the NPRBM have taken protagonist roles on this music sphere; as Abadía-Rexach (2015) comments, this has been achieved through the creation of groups strictly conformed by women. Even though the buleadoras and prima did not conform, to my knowledge, a group by itself, their playing does constitute as a challenge to the traditional, unequal scripts. Hence, while the defiance that the male performer makes to the prima is not a new practice and it is actually fairly common in bomba, it does represent a subversion of the folkloric performance and balances the power relation in favor of the women, who is being challenged and who is keeping up to it.

With these situations, the event at El Hangar can be understood as one that reproduces racial and gender scripts in the sense that there are corporealities that are differentiated by the audience. However, it also represents an instance where the scripts become more flexible and therefore more malleable, since masculine bodies are able to perform feminine movements and vice versa without suspicion from the audience.

Gendered scripts in Doña Caridad Brenes de Cepeda School of Bomba and Plena bombazos. This possibility of performing a different gender, or rather aspects of it, to the one traditionally expected does not occur in all the contemporary instances of bomba. In the Doña Caridad Brenes de Cepeda School's bombazos, the traditional roles are upheld both in practice and discourse. For example, in the bombazo at Condado, one of the interludes between songs was a didactic lesson on the gender roles of bomba, as well as the "appropriate" names for each position. A man, who seemed to be one of the coordinators of the activity, said that the tradition establishes that men are supposed to play the drums while women are supposed to sing and dance. He put extra emphasis on the gender of each role when he said that "el primo sigue a la bailadora—no bailarina ni bailador, *bailadora*—y hay

una cantadora—no cantador ni cantante, *cantadora"*[64]. The repetitive stressing of the roles that each gender should undertake (which is possible in Spanish) is consonant with how, in different musical genres, women are relegated to the dancing slot and men are consigned to the playing slot (Abadía, 2015, p. 155).

Compatible with this discourse are the practices that took place in both bombazos in Viejo San Juan and Condado. In Viejo San Juan, around eighteen tambores were playing, all by men. One woman was holding the maraca and was functioning as the cantadora, while around four to five women were making the chorus. In Condado, given that it was a smaller place, there were about four men playing the drums and around three women singing, including the cantadora. During the bombazo at Viejo San Juan, I never saw a man enter the *batey*; rather, they were all female—some phenotypically black, others not; some wearing bomba skirts, others using pashminas, and others not using any props. In these instances is possible to see how the gendered scripts of bomba are maintained and assumed by some contemporary groups. Even though there is no explicit evidence of this, the reluctance that some of its coordinators' generation feel toward the new practices could suggest a tendency to distinguish themselves from groups that have come to disrupt the folklore in creative ways and point to themselves as the authenticity keepers. Abadía-Rexach explains that there are "más fricciones y luchas por el deseo de reconocimiento y apropriación (2015, p. 229) in the generation that inherited the bomba tradition as a political enterprise and that have been

[64] "The *primo* follows the bailadora—not the bailarina nor bailador, bailadora—and there is a cantadora—not a cantador nor cantante, cantadora". The words bailador/a and bailarín/na have nuances that depend according to who deploys them and when, since both of them in English mean dancer, as well as share the same definition in the Dictionary of the Spanish Royal Academy of an adjective to describe someone that dances. According to the dictionary, bailarina and bailarín (the feminine and masculine adjectives respectively) refer to a person that executes the art of dancing, while bailadora and bailador (the feminine and masculine adjectives respectively) refer to a person that exectutes *popular dances*, mostly in Spain. This case is similar to "cantador/a" and "cantante", which both mean "singer in English. "Cantante" refers to a person that signs professionally, while "cantadora" and "cantador" (the feminine and masculine adjectives respectively) mean a person with habilities to sign popular songs.

immersed in these projects for decades.

However, in the Condado bombazo, a mulato man from the audience did enter the soberao, performing without caring for what had been said before about the gender roles. No one stopped him as he performed both masculine and feminine movements, and actually some people from the crowd cheered him to continue. This situation shows that, as mentioned before, even those spaces were the transit between the gender dichotomy is not promoted, performing as wanted regardless of what is told can assert agency through the body. This man's hybrid performance, embodying movements from both sides of the traditional gender spectrum, allow for a reconfiguration of the cultural protocols associated with blackness (Blanco-Borelli, 2015).

Conclusions

As a result of the ethnographic accounts just discussed, some generalizations about the contemporary uses of bomba can be made. In the first place, there has been a noticeable shift regarding the ICP's involvement in Puerto Rico's cultural politics due to its increasingly constricted budget. Consequently, their daily Instagram posts suggest that the government institution has transmuted from being the cultural organizer of folkloric activities to being a fairly poor promoter, sharing other entities' and private businesses' through social media.

This alteration has coincided with the boom of the NPRBM, which characterizes for the appearance of bomba groups with fresh perspectives as to what can bomba be used for, like Taller Tambuyé and Taller Tamboricua (Abadía, 2015). The NPRBM also includes traditional groups like the Doña Caridad Brenes de Cepeda School that in recent years have reinvented themselves by widening their realm of activities with events like open bombazos. Thus, the racial and gendered scripts of the folkloric tradition have become available for expansion and (re)creation, allowing for new and diversified performances to develop. The array of purposes that bomba can serve, therefore, expands. Bomba becomes the center for

entrepreneurism and exercise like in BombAeróbicos, for marginalized narrative tellings like in the Magia de los Tambores, for political contestation like at El Hangar, and for community release like Tírate un Piquete. This aligns with E. Patrick Johnson's theorization of how, in times of crises, some sectors of society question notions of authenticity and attempt reconfigure cultural practices (2003). In his words, "these crises set the stage for "acting out" identity politics, occasions when those excluded from the parameters of blackness invent their own" (Johnson, 2003, p. 2).

In these new attempts of reinventing bomba and its scripts, the levels of folklore and creativity vary. While some groups are openly opposed to certain traditions (like El Hangar's crowd to gendered roles), others might very well use them as part of their advertisement and profit (like BombAeróbicos and its constant publicity as *gesta cultural*). This demonstrates that while the ICP is no longer an active sponsor of activities, the legacy of the times when it consolidated the scripts is still felt in the collective consciousness and in the interpretations of them deployed in social spaces. Furthermore, the level of reinvention can be mediated by external factors like private or municipal sponsorship, like in the case of Taller Tamboricua and MCS and La Magia de los Tambores and the municipal government.

In what concerns BombAeróbicos specifically, my ethnographic data indicates that, discursively, Taller Tamboricua resignifies bomba, as a fun activity to do throughout the year and as a "verdadera alternativa de salud[65]", as its coordinator, Elia Cortés, has said in interviews (Barceló Jiménez, 2018). The fact that they have a health insurance plan sponsorship reinforces this rhetoric. However, in practice, BombAeróbicos do not erase traditional bomba understandings that conceive it as a past activity associated with blackness and slavery. This became evident in several instances in which the expansion of the scripts became challenging due to bomba's inextricable link to folkloric ideologies. The low

[65] "A true health alternative".

participation rates in BombAeróbicos in comparison to Zumba and the participants' reluctance to piquetear in the batey point to this connection. What these situations, both the practical and the discursive, unveil is a conflictive coexistence of two meanings for bomba: bomba as folklore and bomba as an everyday activity. BombAeróbicos' negotiations with its private sponsors added up to complicate even further the dynamics among coordinators and participants, since some of the people that expressed an affinity towards the dance-exercise could not attend due to conflicts with the calendar proposed by MCS.

Thus, we could imagine bomba's contemporary practices as a spectrum where one end is tradition and the other is creativity and free expression. It is tempting to locate folklore and the State-sponsored scripts alongside tradition, and corporate sponsorship and commercial use alongside creativity. After all, this aligns with the distinctions created by official cultural policy, as part of "a greater process of struggle over the content of legitimacy in the nationalist ideology" (Dávila, 1997, p. 219). However, affirming this would fail to recognize that there are groups adhered to more traditional deployments of bomba and government sponsorships that still produce creative and expressive activities. Such is the case of Magia de los Tambores, organized by the Doña Caridad Brenes de Cepeda School of Bomba and Plena, where silenced narratives about slaves are spoken out. Or it would also mean not acknowledging the limitations that BombAeróbicos experienced regarding its private funding by MCS.

Nevertheless, focusing in the spectrum as tradition in one side and creativity in the other, BombAeróbicos could be located in the center. This position is explained by the coexistence of both racial scripts of blackness as essential to the body (as seen in the participants expectations of Elena to perform better than anyone) and of blackness as present in the everydayness (as portrayed in Elia's rethoric of *doing culture* through exercise). Given that both an assumption and a (re) writing of the scripts occus, BombAeróbicos' central

location is also true for gendered scripts of bomba if considered in the context of the broader bomba panorama. Specifically, the traditional scripts are engendered when men are the only ones that play the drums, and are (re)invented when the dance instructor performs feminine movements, detaching bomba from ideologies that link it to femininity and traditional dresses.

The other bomba events to which I attended inform and broaden this analysis: my arguments rely on examples of bomba activities more and less traditional than BombAeróbicos. Festival de Bomba y Plena in Hatillo and the Doña Caridad Brenes de Cepeda School bombazos were some events that represented less flexibility for the movement through folkloric notions of authenticity and creative innovations. Both activities counted with government sponsorships, particularly municipal government financial support, and the displays of tradition in them were more predominant than the deployment of creative and innovative expressions. Thus, bomba is here presented as a traditional performance related to folkloric blackness, which reproduces the institutionalized racialized scripts.

Furthermore, both activities abide to the gendered scripts of bomba, for, as a coordinator of the Condado bombazo stressed, men play the drums while women sing and dance. Nonetheless, this did not prevent a man from the audience to get up and dance in the batey, thus disrupting what had been said before and assuming the scripts in his own way. Likewise, the Doña Caridad Brenes de Cepeda school bombazos included historical narratives about bomba that situated slaves at the center, thus advancing their political agenda of visibilizing blackness. These examples demonstrate that even events that abide to more traditional understandings of bomba in order to signify authenticity are exposed to the reinterpretation of scripts and the deployment of creative expressions by the audience. Hence, the overall activity might function as a locus for the coexistence of different meanings for bomba.

In events where an informal take to bomba predominated, like in El Gandúl and in Taller Tambuyé's bombazo, the institutionalized scripts of bomba were used for multiple purposes. For example, in El Gandúl, the batey was summoned as a political demonstration against the government's inaction toward gender violence in the country, as well as a safe space to feel and to grief, somehow similar to bomba's meaning during slavery for people of African descent. In Taller Tambuyé's event, its relaxed setting and Penelope's discourse of the group as a family indicated that bomba has possibilities to produce social cohesion and affinities within the group. Thus, in both occasions, a sense of community was very present, which contrasted highly to activities like the Bomba and Plena Festival, and the racialized scripts of bomba were performed in alternative ways to the institutionalized ones. These dynamics could be partially attributed to not being pressured to depict bomba in a particular way due to the lack of private or public sponsorship.

Additionally, both activities allowed for a transit forth and back the binary gendered bomba scripts. In Taller Tambuyé's bombazo, this flexibility was noticeable in the predominant presence of women, as well as in their tendency to have female members play the drums. In El Gandúl's bombazo, the fluid performance of gender was evident in the men's feminine performances and in the women's willingness to play the drums and subvert the traditional gender roles. However, the dynamics in these events also unveiled the limits of the flexibility that existed related to the scripts. The audience's different reactions to the female performances in El Gandúl according to their racial phenotype, partially stemming from their idea of what is authentic bomba, illustrates these limits.

Consequently, my ethnographic work shows multiple uses of bomba in the everyday life, ones more creative and others more traditional. The selection to deploy more folklore or innovation seemed to respond to audiences, groups missions and limitations by both public and private sponsorship. Thus, the racialized and gendered scripts of bomba are open to

(re)interpretations and (re)invention in the contemporary social arena of Puerto Rico, engendering complex and contradictory meanings in themselves. This speaks to human agency, a key element of sociological research.

Last thoughts

By the end of my fieldwork, the fears and concerns of the participants and coordinators of BombAeróbicos at Parque Lineal became true: MCS had retired its sponsorship due to low participation. Daniel announced this after March's last class, which I did not attend, thus I was informed of these news through the WhatsApp chat. After not meeting up for about two weeks, some of the participants started convening new meetings, counting with Daniel to still give the classes even without being economically remunerated for them. They tried out different hours to see how many people could arrive if the classes were offered later and shared multiple videos of the routines to motivate people to attend. From the videos I saw, Daniel was not offering only BombAeróbicos. Some days, he was giving Zumba classes; others, he was giving BombAeróbicos with the rhythm coming out of a radio and not a live drum like it used to be. By the end of April, one of the leaders of the new initiative indicated that the WhatsApp group would be closed so that a new one—one that accounted for the new versions and dynamics of the classes—could be created.

One the one hand, this last ethnographic note points out the complex arenas that gestoras of bomba face as they attempt to challenge the traditional scripts, while still running a profitable business in the new difficult socioeconomic context. On the other hand, it also mirrors E.P. Johnson's argument that (re)innovation emerges in situations of crisis, since a sense of community and mutual effort (one that I have not noticed before and had called a musical pathway) is beginning to develop in order to keep offering the classes. Despite how unfortunate it was for Taller Tamboricua to lose that sponsorship for that class, they still have their financial support in other classes, like some fitness sessions in Caguas and Carolina.

The participants' effort to self-manage the classes is indicative of Michel Foucault's statement of the existence of a plurality of resistances, which leaves us—at least, me—optimistic of what new enterprises will these group now embark themselves into as they appropriate and expand bomba's gendered and racialized scripts.

My ethnography in the BombAeróbicos presented throughout my discussion accounts for several manifestations of the creative modality that reflect structural issues on race, gender, and sponsorship. Furthermore, given the variety of events I visited, the concerns here presented illuminate not only the understanding of a Taller Tamboricua activity, but add on perspectives and readings to how creative expressions of bomba both reproduce and expand on notions of authenticity. Thus, by analyzing micro-situations like the bombazos abiertos, BombAeróbicos sessions and folkloric festivals, this research contributes to understanding the structural ideologies of race and gender in Puerto Rico as manifested in music. Moreover, due to the parallelisms drawn with other Caribbean and Latin American expressions (like rumba, capoeira, and GarifunaRobics), this project potentially sheds light on similar experiences in the region.

Studying race in Puerto Rico and how its racial understandings are constantly created and (re)created in the everydayness can shed light on similar processes in the Hispanic Caribbean and Latin America. This topic gains even more relevance in the Decenio Internacional para los Afrodescendientes, since its intention is to strengthen international efforts for the social, cultural, and civic rights of people of African heritage. Hence, besides the fact that this research studies a singular cultural manifestation of a particular musical genre in one specific country, it will also contribute to our understanding of cultural practices in other Afro-Caribbean and Afro-Latin-American context. This research will have political implications that should be distinguished from the academic ones. My study will bring the agency of certain groups to the forefront as they challenge racial understandings through the

use of music and fight the notions of race as something essentialized or binary. Likewise, this work has the potential of bringing to the forefront their intentions of visibilizing our African descent.

Further research could explore how other modalities of Taller Tamboricua, like its Aqua-BombAeróbicos, manage the scripts and navigate the private sponsorships. Similarly, a study on how health plans are including folkloric events to their realm of activities for senior citizens could potentially shed light on how Puerto Rico's cultural politics are changing and who is becoming responsible for them[66]. Likewise, there is fertile terrain for research that accounts for other uses of bomba, like percussion classes for deaf people and the use of bomba in yoga. These dynamics indicate a shift on the understandings of authenticity and the imageries of nationalism in the Island. As these inquiries—and many others—are left open to be answered in other research ventures, and the political context tenses into a more restrictive, less open-to-diverse society, it is worth remembering Godreau's thoughts on the uses that scripts allow. In her words, "while scripts are mediated by powerful actors, folklore practitioners might very well use them in unexpected contexts to challenge a dominant rhetoric" (2015, p. 97-98). We can apply this not only to folkloric practices, but to any instance in life where an everyday, creative activity can contest structural realities.

[66] An example of this would be Triple S's launching of a program called "Al Son de Cachita". The program functions as a space of socialization and entertainment for older people, offering "música, comida típica y juegos para invitar la conversación" ("Triple S", 2018). A photo of a black old woman dancing bomba with a skirt on is featured in the advertising article.

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CERTIFICACIÓN

Número del protocolo: 1819-046

Título del protocolo: Race, Bomba, and the Everydayness: Racial Understandings in Bomba Practices

Recinto de
Rio Piedras

Investigadora: Johanna Hernández Pérez

Certifico que este protocolo fue evaluado administrativamente el 10 de octubre de 2018 y declarado exento de la revisión adicional del CIPSHI bajo la categoría #2 del 45 CFR §46.101 (b).

Carlos I. González Vargas, Ph.D.
Decano Interino

15 de mayo de 2019
Fecha

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