Imagining the Afro-Uruguayan Conventillo: Belonging and the Fetish of Place and Blackness

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education Ontario Institute for Studies in Education University of Toronto

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Abstract

This thesis explores the symbolic place occupied by a racialized neighbourhood within the Uruguayan national imaginary. I study the conventillos (tenement buildings) of two traditionally Afro-Uruguayan neighbourhoods in Montevideo, Barrio Sur and Palermo. These neighbourhoods are considered the cradle of Afro-Uruguayan culture and identity. The conventillos have been immortalized in paintings, souvenirs, songs, and books. Over the years most of the residents were evicted due to demolitions, which peaked during Uruguay’s military dictatorship (1973-1984). I address the paradox of how a community can be materially marginalized, yet symbolically celebrated, a process that is evident in other American nations (Brazil, Colombia, etc.). I show how race, class, and gender are entangled in folkloric depictions of the conventillo to constitute a limited notion of blackness that naturalizes the relationship between Afro-Uruguayans, music, sexuality, and domestic work. The folklorization of the space and its residents is shown to be a “fetishization” which enhances the whiteness of the national identity, while confining the parameters of black citizenship and belonging.

Utilizing a methodology that draws on cultural geography, critical race, postcolonial, and feminist theory, my dissertation analyzes the various ways that the Barrio Sur/Palermo conventillo has been imagined, represented, and experienced. Specifically, I examine 1) autobiographical, literary and popular (media, songs) narratives
about these neighbourhoods; 2) the depiction of the *conventillo* by a prominent artist (Carlos Páez Vilaró); 3) spatial practices; 4) the performance of a dancer who emerged from the *conventillo* to become a national icon (the Carnival vedette Rosa Luna); and 5) interviews with nine key informants. My analysis focuses on how bodies, subjects, and national belonging are constituted through relations to particular spaces. By foregrounding the “geographies of identity” (Radcliffe and Westwood, 1996, p. 27), I show that the symbolic celebration of black space goes hand in hand with material disavowal. This study thus connects the imagining of a local, racialized space to how national belonging is constituted and experienced.
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Dedicated to Celina (Chela Mazuí) and Victor Sztainbok, who taught me that asking questions is important and that it is never too late to start something new.
Introduction to the Afro-Uruguayan conventillo

The black was for a long time confined to the conventillo and for a long time to speak of the conventillo meant imagining it populated by blacks even though, of course, there were also individuals of various shades of skin.¹

(Renzo Pi Hugarte, 2001, p. 4)

Finally, the culture of the conventillo is recuperated and in the last decade of the century we saw the “official” revitalization of candombe taken up by the entire citizenry. It no longer knows the boundaries of the conventillo gates or of the month of February, but it defines itself as Uruguayan. The press is also transformed and speaks of the “celebration of the Uruguyan people.” It is experienced as belonging to the whole society and it is presented to the world as a marker of national identity.

(Alejandrina da Luz, 2001, p. 47)

Conventillos were a type of tenement building common in the River Plate region from the late 19th- to mid 20th-centuries. The typical Montevideo conventillo was a rectangular building with many rooms facing an open central courtyard; generally one family lived in one room. Toilets, cooking, and washing facilities were common areas (see figure 1). Conventillos were built as cheap housing during a period of heavy immigration. They were the first type of planned housing in Montevideo (Conti, 1986). Initially, immigrants, formerly enslaved Afro-Uruguayans, and rural migrants resided in these buildings due to their affordability. As immigrants moved up the social scale, many would move on to “better” neighbourhoods and many of the black residents stayed on, suggesting a relation between race and social mobility (Luz, 2001; Rodríguez, 2001)). Conventillos were particularly common in two adjacent neighbourhoods known for their “Afro-Uruguayanness,” Barrio Sur and Palermo. The Barrio Sur and Palermo conventillos have mostly been torn down, but they live on in the national memory. Their history shows that these spaces are at once culturally significant and socially marginal. The conventillos are revered as the “cradle” of candombe – an Afro-Uruguayan musical style that is associated with carnival and the national identity. Yet most of the Afro-Uruguayan residents of these neighbourhoods were displaced through a series of evictions that peaked during the nation’s military dictatorship from 1973 to 1984, effectively erasing blackness from the city centre (Ortuño, 2006; Rodríguez, 2001).

¹ Please note: all translations from Spanish to English are my own. Where pertinent I have also included the Spanish original. Some key words are translated in the glossary, see Appendix A.
The pairing of Alejandrina da Luz and Renzo Pi Hugarte above provides a snapshot of how the conventillo looms in the national imagination.² On the one hand, Pi Hugarte insinuates a negative connotation between the conventillos and blackness. While they existed, the conventillos were weighted with the stigma of being overcrowded, filthy places, where families piled into a single room and led lives that were viewed as less than respectable (Barrán, 1995; Pi Hugarte, 2001). On the other hand, Luz points to the national celebration of conventillo culture, particularly once the buildings no longer exist and the residents have been dispersed. In fact, on December 3, 2006, the nation’s first black member of parliament, Edgardo Ortuño, presided over a new national holiday celebrating Afro-Uruguayan national heritage and racial equity. Promoted by sectors of the Afro-Uruguayan community and the then recently elected left-of-centre coalition (Encuentro Progresista - Frente Amplio) this day was named Día Nacional del Candombe, la Cultura Afrouruguaya y la Equidad Racial. The date was chosen because it commemorates the last day that the drums sounded in Medio Mundo, one of the best known conventillos. The actual building was bulldozed in 1979 during Uruguay’s military dictatorship, an act that some have condemned as deeply racist (Rodríguez, 2001). Despite its destruction, however, Medio Mundo has a prominent place in local and national memory. This tenement has been immortalized in paintings, photographic exhibits, songs, books, and now, a national holiday.

The meanings associated with the conventillo are varied and evocative. For many former residents, these neighbourhoods are remembered as a site of family, solidarity, hardship, and very humble beginnings. In the many souvenirs that feature Barrio Sur and Palermo, candombe drummers, candombe characters, and picturesque conventillo clotheslines figure prominently. For some, the conventillos of Barrio Sur and Palermo are cultural heritage sites (Tomás Olivera Chirimini, personal communication). For others, they represent the exotic unknown, the “interior of negritude” (Páez Vilaró, 2000, p.7). It is also worth noting that quite a few prominent Afro-Uruguayan artists of the last sixty years were associated with these neighbourhoods including Rosa Luna, Ruben Galloza,

² Hugarte’s comments are contained in the introduction to Alejandrina da Luz’s (2001) book, Los conventillos de barrio Sur y Palermo: mucho más que casas de inquilinato.
Lagríma Ríos, Martha Gularte, Ruben Rada, and the famous comparsa (drumming troupe), Morenada.

The salience of the conventillo within the national imaginary and its simultaneous marginality led me to think more deeply about how this space speaks of the relationship between race and nation. The contradictory meanings mapped upon this space, the coexistence of its denigration and its exaltation, and its connection to the articulation of the national culture led me to put forth the conventillo as a site that can offer insights into the interplay between race, geography, culture, and citizenship. When I began my research I started out by thinking more deeply about Hugarte’s and Luz’s observations. I started out by asking: What did it mean for the conventillo to be imagined as black? What did blackness mean and for whom? How is it that a racialized culture is celebrated, while racialized peoples are displaced?

Motivated by these questions, I began by reading different narratives about Medio Mundo and, more generally, Barrio Sur and Palermo. I looked at the scant historical work, as well as autobiographical materials, literary, media, and other representations (such as songs and photos). I then developed a methodology for studying the significance of the conventillo guided by the notion that spaces are produced through and produce social relations, subjectivities, and power (Lefebvre, 1991; Pile, 1996). Utilizing an interdisciplinary framework, the central questions posed by my project became:

- What are the meanings attached to the Afro-Uruguayan conventillo?
- How does the conventillo make meaning?
- How do people come to know themselves through this site?

To address these questions, I examine and juxtapose autobiographical, literary, popular, and media accounts of the conventillo. In addition, I examine the performance of one of the most celebrated carnival vedettes in Uruguayan history, Rosa Luna, a woman who hailed from the conventillo. Broadly speaking, I focus on the Barrio Sur/Palermo conventillo from the period when it peaked as a black cultural space in the 1940s to its demise in the 1970s. Yet, because these spaces live on in individual and collective memories, this is not a strictly chronological tale. So for instance, in chapter three I examine a play written in the 1960s, which is set in a 1920s conventillo. And, many of the materials on Rosa Luna track her career until her death in 1993, since her
performance outlived the conventillo. The temporal framing of my analysis moves back and forth in time, as does the space itself within various imaginaries. My objective is to unpack how subjects, bodies, and national belonging are constituted through symbolic and material relations to the conventillo. I undertake a layered analysis, which mobilizes theoretical tools from various frameworks including cultural geography, feminist poststructuralism, postcolonial studies, and performance theory. In the first instance I am guided by scholars, located in various disciplines, who critically theorize race and connect the black body to space, whiteness, and subjectivity (Fanon, 1967; Farley, 1997; McKittrick, 2000a; Nast, 2000; Silva, 2001). Several of these theorists also deploy a psychoanalytic lens (Fanon, Farley, Nast), which I draw on to explore how the conventillo fits into what Steve Pile (1996) calls the “psychodynamics of place.” Pile uses this term to describe the embeddedness of geography in shaping subjectivities:

The streets are emblematic of the production of a psychodynamics of place which involves the intersection of desire, voyeurism and commodification, of race, class and gender. The streets are part and parcel of an urban imaginary, populated by figures who are not simply metaphorical or allegorical, but also flesh and blood. (Pile, 1996, p. 234)

Following Pile, places in the city are also places in the psyche. This thesis begins to map the place occupied by the conventillo’s blackness within individual and national imaginations, a blackness that I always understand as being socially produced and as having material consequences. Therefore, as I proceed, I connect these imaginings to the “flesh and blood” subjects who are presumed to embody the “carnivalesque blackness” of the conventillo.

It has already been noted that in Uruguay, blackness is predominantly portrayed through folkloric and/or sexualized images (Frigerio, 2000; Rodríguez, 2006). Studying this site through an interdisciplinary framework allows me to theorize how the folklorization of the conventillo is implicated in subject-making. I “enter” the conventillo through three specific vantage-points, which reflect common ways that this space has been represented, perceived, and/or experienced: 1) Chapter three considers “narratives of the clotheslines,” narratives that connect conventillo women to domestic work; 2) Chapter four analyzes how the conventillo figures within the text of Carlos Páez Vilaró,
an artist who has been instrumental in “promoting” the conventillo Medio Mundo within mainstream Uruguayan culture; and, 3) Chapter five analyzes the significance of the performance of Rosa Luna, an iconic Afro-Uruguayan vedette.

Through my analysis, I reveal that the folklorization of the conventillo and its residents naturalizes the relationship between Afro-Uruguayans, music, sexuality, and domestic work. Furthermore, in chapter four, by focusing on how one individual negotiates his subjectivity with relation to the conventillo, I find that the conventillo is fetishized as a boundary marker between blackness and whiteness, a fetish which disavows the construction of this difference. More than a mere metaphor, the conventillo-as-boundary is shown to be productive of subjects and structures of un/belonging. Lastly, my examination of the reception of Rosa Luna’s performance makes visible the centrality of performances/spectacles of blackness for the apprehension of the “symbolic order.” The symbolic order is a term from Lacanian psychoanalysis, which refers to how subjects negotiate their subjectivity in relation to culturally mediated symbols. The symbolic order is critical for how subjects apprehend who embodies power in relation to whom (Bergner, 2005). By drawing upon theorists who problematize classic psychoanalysis and show its implication in racialization, I provide evidence that the symbolic order is apprehended, not only in intimate, familial settings, but also through urban geographies, and the performance of black femininity in a public space.

This thesis makes a significant contribution by arguing that the folklorization of a black space reveals the centrality of the desire for – and the disavowal of – blackness within this white-identified nation. I argue that the conventillo is an evocative space because of the way it is connected to the negotiation of the symbolic order – an aspect of how subjects apprehend the racialized, gendered, hierarchy. The folklorization of the conventillo is a fetishization – an attempt to fix the meaning and boundaries of blackness - a way of dealing with the anxieties produced by the inherent ambiguity of race difference, the anxiety produced by the fear of merging with blackness, the fear of not being able to tell the difference. Therefore the fetishization is implicated in producing whiteness, while confining blackness.
Background: Race and nation in Uruguay and Latin America

To situate this study I begin by providing some background on the relation between race and nation in Uruguay and in Latin America. This discussion foregrounds that “national identities have been constructed in racial terms and that definitions of race have been shaped by processes of nation building” (Applebaum, Macpherson, & Rosemblatt, 2003, p. 2). As many scholars have noted race is an idea, and it is a very powerful one that constitutes knowledge, bodies, identities, and geographies (Alcoff, 2002; Goldberg, 1993; Omi & Winant., 1989; Said, 1979; Stoler, 1995; Wade, 1997). The nation, here, is understood as “imagined” (Anderson, 1991), “narrated” (Bhabha, 1990), and called into being through the daily practices that mark nationhood such as the drawing of maps, the singing of the anthem, the building of monuments, and the evocation of “blood” and kinship ties (Alonso, 1994; Radcliffe & Westwood, 1996). National narratives in literature, history, social science, etc., construct a sense of who embodies the normative national subject. In addition, it is evident that race and nation interlock with gender, sexuality, and class in constituting identities. This is a key insight, which I build on through the thesis. I also highlight the simultaneous inclusion and exclusion of racialized peoples and cultures within Latin American national projects.

Race and Nation in Uruguay

In this small South American nation of approximately three and a half million people, 6-8% of the population identifies as black (Bucheli & Cabella, 2006; Ferreira, 2003). This figure is based on self-identification and is obtained from the 1996 census. This was the first census to track race as a socio-economic factor, a move that was instigated by lobbying from Afro-Uruguayan activists (Bucheli & Cabella, 2006; Rodríguez, 2006). While poverty has never been the sole domain of the black

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3 This census asked the question “What race do you believe you belong to?” Interestingly the 2006 census collected racial data by asking: “Do you believe that you have (black, white, yellow, indigenous, other) ancestors?” This latter question led almost 10% of the population to assert black ancestry (Bucheli & Cabella, 2006). I agree with Marisa Bucheli and Wanda Cabella’s (2006) interpretation that the two questions were measuring different things. The first question targeted an individual’s identity. There may have been many who did not identify as ,and/or were not identified by others as black, in the first census, who identified as having black ancestry in the second. Bucheli and Cabella note that racism itself may have led to lower numbers on the first census. People may have been hesitant to identify as black in answer to the 1996 question, but felt more comfortable answering positively to the second, since it did not mark the respondent as black.
population, this census confirmed that race was a significant factor in economic and social stratification. Statistically, black people begin working at an earlier age, receive less schooling, and earn less (68%) than their white counterparts (Rodríguez 2003, pp. 89 – 95). Afro-Uruguayans are over-represented in lower income jobs and under-represented the administrative and professional sector. Even controlling for education and years of experience, Afro-Uruguayans receive lower remuneration than their white counterparts (Bucheli & Cabella, 2006, p. 48). Another factor that characterizes racial inequity in Uruguay is the invisibility of black people in the national pedagogy outside of the spaces of candombe and carnival. In a country where black soldiers fought for independence, and black writers and the black press have been notoriously active, the historical, political, and intellectual contributions of black people have not traditionally been recognized (Ferreira, 2003; Luz, 1995)). And, as mentioned above, the first Afro-Uruguayan member-of-parliament (Edgardo Ortuño) was elected in 2005.

To begin to understand the roots of racial hierarchy in Uruguay, it is necessary to go back to the nation’s origins. Uruguay achieved statehood between the years 1825-1830. It was founded through an entanglement of struggles of independence from Spain and Portugal and British commercial interests. As in the rest of Latin America, a retroactive search for identity followed formal nationhood. Legally, the constitution declared that citizenship was confined to white, property-owning males (Achugar, 1994). In Uruguay, as in Argentina, national thinkers and elites rejected mestizaje (discussed below) as a national model and focused on how to whiten the population (Joseph, 2000; Sapriza, 2003; Sztainbok, 2002). This was accomplished through material and discursive violence. The indigenous population was violently persecuted and then narrated as “exterminated” (Sztainbok, 2002, forthcoming in 2009). Black men were given incentives to join the army both before and following abolition. Given that Uruguay was engaged in wars for most of the 19th-century, this meant that black men were basically used as “cannon fodder” (Rodríguez, 2006, p. 68). In addition, both indigenous and black populations were all but written out of the national record. As Hugo Achugar (1994; 4)

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4 Uruguay was strategically positioned because of Montevideo’s port, and its function as a territorial buffer between its more powerful neighbours, Argentina and Brazil (Caetano, 1991; Real de Azúa, 1975, 1990). Britain was invested in maintaining a division between these two territories (Caetano, 1991; Real de Azúa, 1975, 1990). Uruguay achieved independence from Portugal in 1825 and a constitution was declared in 1830.
Achugar, 1997) notes, literary narratives are key to constructing a sense of national identity. Early Uruguayan national narratives in history and literature predominantly projected whiteness (Achugar, 1994; Burgueño, 2000; González Laurino, 2001; Sztainbok, 2002, forthcoming in 2009).\(^5\)

Moving into the 20\(^{th}\)-century, Gerardo Caetano (1992) documents how the nation’s centennial was taken up as an opportunity to narrate the nation as neo-European. Uruguay’s Centennial Book (El libro del Centenario del Uruguay) celebrated “the only nation in America that can positively state that there is not one nucleus that remembers its aboriginal population within its boundaries” (as cited in Caetano, 1992, p. 87). For Caetano,

what really stood out, was the absence of Indigenous people and how much this favoured social and racial cohesion, which was proclaimed repeatedly as one of the “relative advantages of this Latin American country.” In addition, the reiteration of the weak social and cultural presence of blacks, who were said to have “suffered because of the climate, the environmental circumstances, and because of the mixing with European blood had undergone fundamental modifications.”

(Caetano, 1992, p. 88, with quotes from Uruguay’s Centennial Book)

Given the Eurocentrism of Uruguay’s national identity, it may seem surprising that the nation draws significantly on elements of black culture for its definition. There has been little discussion in Uruguayan studies on how blackness constitutes the nation, despite the fact that candombe is one of the things that “unequivocally defines us in the world” (Tomás Olivera Chirimini & Varese, 2000, p. 78). Furthermore, Luis Ferreira (2006) points to the neglect of race as a category for the analysis of Uruguayan society. The first studies of the social conditions facing Afro-Uruguayans were late in coming, relatively few, and limited by their theoretical perspectives (Carvalho-Neto, 1965; Pereda Valdés, 1965; C. M. Rama, 1967). Although they provided valuable historical documentation and evidence of social inequity, these scholars held an essentialist view of race. Paulo Carvalho-Neto and Ildefonso Pereda Valdés both dwell on the “poverty” of Afro-Uruguayan culture and identity (for a deeper analysis see Frigerio, 2000).

\(^5\) This would include writings by Juan Zorrilla de San Martín, Eduardo Acevedo, and Pablo Blanco Acevedo, and José Enrique Rodó among others.
Rama sees class as the determining factor in Uruguayan society, minimizing the continuing importance of racial hierarchy.

Recent research, much of it instigated by Afro-Uruguayan activists, tries to address this gap. Several researchers establish the structural marginalization of Afro-Uruguayans based on health, education, and employment indicators (Ediciones Mundo Afro, 1998; J. Foster, 2001; Rodríguez, 2003, 2006). In the cultural arena, an anthology edited by Beatriz Santos (1998c) documents Afro-Uruguayan cultural, social, and linguistic contributions. Luis Ferreira (2001), and Tomás Olivera Chirimini and Juan Antonio Varese (2000; 2002) are researching Afro-Uruguayan musical epistemologies. Different aspects of Afro-Uruguayan history are being updated by Ferreira (2003), as well as George Reid Andrews (2004; 2007a) and Oscar Montaño (1997; 2001). In addition, there is a growing scholarship on Afro-Uruguayan literature that analyzes works largely neglected by Uruguayan literary studies (Jackson, 1979; M. A. Lewis, 2003; N. Roberts, 2004; Santos, 1998b; Young, 2004).

What requires more thought, however, is how the public erasure noted by Ferreira, Luz, Rodríguez, and others is coupled with the hypervisibility of blackness in the context of the conventillo, candombe, and carnival. My intention is not to disparage the artistic, intellectual, and spiritual significance of Afro-Uruguayan cultural practices, but to point to the problematic aspects of this positioning. In addition to being inaccurate, it is restrictive. As noted by Romero Rodríguez (2006, p. 75), “the official culture consolidates a partial image of black people. It salvages nothing more than the music and the dances, couched in pseudo-folkloric theories.”

Alejandro Frigerio (2000) empiricizes these observations by reviewing the representation of blackness in various areas including musicology, history, anthropology, and the mainstream press. He confirms what has long been discernible; Afro-Uruguayans are primarily associated with music, candombe and Carnival. In early histories written by Isidoro De María in 1888 and Vicente Rossi in 1958, Frigerio (2000, p. 77) finds the stereotype of the infantile, naïve and loyal servant, “whose only special characteristic seems to be the ability to drum and dance in order to forget the hardships of slavery and the longing for his/her native land.” The same narratives are repeated by Antonio Plácido in his history of Uruguayan Carnival, and in the poetry of Rubén Carámbula of 1952.
According to Frigerio, musicologist Lauro Ayestarán (1950s–1980s) as well as the anthropologists Carvalho Neto (1950s–1970s) and Idelfonso Pereda Valdés (1930s–1960s) depart from these stereotypes, but they are problematic because they idealize a pure, authentic Afro-Uruguayan past. Contemporary black culture is then viewed as “a degeneration of the original and every innovation, necessarily constitutes a deformity” (Frigerio, 2000, p. 83).

In newspapers, Frigerio finds that images of Afro-Uruguayanness are primarily sensual and/or folkloric. Black Uruguayan men are portrayed as entertainers, and black women as sexual objects (Frigerio, 2000, p. 125). Frigerio’s study identifies the primary stereotypes that frame blackness in the hegemonic Uruguayan imaginary. These tropes do not differ much from Frantz Fanon’s (1967) realization of that his body signifies primitiveness, sexual depravity, and entertainment.

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon (1967) describes how it feels to be embodied through blackness, a social construction that he links to colonialism and slavery. Fanon recounts how he feels when he encounters the white gaze. He is dissected and objectified. He feels his “corporeal schema crumbl[e], its place taken by a racial epidermal schema” (Fanon, 1967, p. 112). Fanon identifies the many qualities that blackness embodies and that he therefore embodies: savagery, idiocy, illiteracy, cannibalism, frivolity. Fanon (1967, p.134) says, “And so it is not I who make a meaning for myself, but it is the meaning that was already there, pre-existing, waiting for me.” While there are certainly local differences in how people are racialized, Fanon’s observations apply to the dominant constructions of blackness throughout the hemisphere. As Whitten and Quiroga (1998) attest, to be “blackened” has not had a historically positive connotation in Latin America as elsewhere:

*Negrear* can also mean to make someone “disappear” as a social being of worth. For example, the verb is applied to people who have been promised a salary at one level, and then are actually given far less. Such a person is *tratado como negro*, “treated like a black,” or simply *negreado*, “blackened.”

(Whitten & Quiroga, 1998, p. 86)
Racial Inclusion and Exclusion in Latin America

Historically, Latin American ideas of race were not homogeneous, but they were generally premised on the assumption of white superiority. This belief originated during the colonial era, when the inferiority of dark-skinned people was argued by Christian theologians (Chaves, 200?; Martínez, 2004). It was strengthened by Enlightenment conceptions of the universal, human subject – which framed civility and rationality as the province of whiteness – and by the science of race, which emerged in the 19th-century (Goldberg, 1993; Graham, 1990; Mohanram, 1999; Silva, 1998). Yet, national projects also drew upon racialized elements to define the nation, so that racial hierarchy has been constituted through a complex interplay of both inclusion and exclusion (Wade, 2003, 2005).

By the early twentieth century, Latin American nationalisms featured the “management” of racial diversity (Graham, 1990; Wade, 1997, 2001). Most nations emphasized their European heritage, given that they aimed to be part of the rational and modern world. They downplayed the Indigenous and Afro-descendant elements of the population because these had been defined as primitive, pre-modern, and irrational by contemporary racial thought. The ‘problem’ of race was resolved through appeal to the idea of racial mixture, known as mestizaje, mestiçajem or mulatez. Mestizaje generally refers to both cultural and biological mixing of differently racialized groups. Mestizaje is not a monolithic, but a hybrid discourse, which has meant different things in different times and place (De la Cadena, 2005; Martinez-Echazabal, 1998). In some cases (Brazil, Mexico), mestizaje was taken up as a positive thing that would improve the nation (Radcliffe & Westwood, 1996; Silva, 1998; Wade, 1997). In La Raza Cósmica, Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos (1979(1925)) espoused the view that the mixing of the races would yield a new race of humans, the “cosmic race.” Anthropologist Gilberto Freyre held that the combination of Portuguese and African blood in Brazil would result in a unique race that would be best suited for the territory and for progressing into modernity (Silva, 1998; Skidmore, 1990). Within this logic, however, whiteness was more favourably weighted. Implicit in national discourses of mestizaje was the idea was that the “race” would be improved through whitening. Peter Wade points out that
*Mestizaje* takes on powerful moral connotations: it is not just neutral mixture but hierarchical movement, and the movement that potentially has greatest value is upward movement – *blanqueamiento* or whitening understood in physical and cultural terms. 

(Wade, 1994, p. 21)

Discourses of *mestizaje* made “use” of blackness or indigeneity, but in a way that privileged whiteness. In Ecuador, for instance, appeal to a native heritage through cultural artifacts alluded to the nation’s mythical past and its legitimate connection to the land, but did not fully include indigenous subjects within the nation (Radcliffe & Westwood, 1996). Afro-descended peoples simply did not figure within this national narrative. The co-existence of inclusion and exclusion led Ronald Stutzman (1981) to call *mestizaje* “an all inclusive ideology of exclusion.”

Moreover, gender, sexuality, and class are always “in the mix” in constructions of race and nation (Martinez-Alier, 1989; Mohanram, 1999; Stoler, 1995 and many others). Implicit in the language of *mestizaje* is the transgression of sexual, racial, and class boundaries through sexual union, and anxiety about those transgressions. Denise Ferreira da Silva (1998) examines how a national narrative of miscegenation positions black femininity in Brazil. Brazil’s story of origin holds that the nation is the progeny of a few thousand Portuguese men and countless African or Afro-descendant women, slaves. Constituted by the racial logic of the time and the desire to be considered a modern nation, Brazil was narrated as an ongoing project that had its roots in miscegenation, but was moving towards whiteness. In later works, such as those of sociologist Gilberto Freyre, this racial mix constitutes Brazil as ideally suited to be a modern, tropical democracy. Silva argues that,

this construction of race in the Brazilian text produced a specific conception of black femaleness. With the placing of miscegenation at the heart of the national narrative, sex acquires a rather significant place in the text of Brazilianness. In Freyre’s texts, gender difference more than adds to the already presupposed superiority of the white colonizer over the subordinate races. 

(Silva, 1998, p. 221)

Silva notes how this narrative constitutes specific masculinities and femininities through reference to race and nation. It involves a celebration of the virility of Portuguese men
and presumes the wanton sexuality of black women. Furthermore, the nation’s foundations upon rape and enslavement are occluded. Silva argues that this leaves black woman in an uncompromising position. The black female body is fetishized. It becomes a “national treasure” and “property.” While in Brazil, black femininity acquires specific meanings due to the nation’s narrative, the theme of the sexualization and objectification of black women’s bodies is seen throughout the Americas (Carby, 1986; Hill-Collins, 1990; McKittrick, 2000a; Philip, 1997; D. Roberts, 1994). I return to this theme in later chapters when I discuss the positioning of women vis-à-vis the conventillo.

The discussion on mestizaje also highlights that the construction of racial stratification does not always look like outright rejection of the racialized. Writing of Colombia, Wade complicates the idea that racial alterity is simply denied by the nation:

> When I wrote about Colombian national identity and race in the early nineties (Wade 1993), my own view followed those who saw in modernist nationalism a crushing and erasure of difference. At that point, however, it was also clear to me that representations of the Colombian nation also depended to some extent on the notion of indigenousness and blackness, even if the future was thought of in terms of progressive mixture and “whitening.” Blacks and indigenous people, or at least the image of them, were needed as a reference point against which whiteness and a future of whitened modernity could be defined. Furthermore, it seemed to me then, and even more now, that representations of the nation in some sense took nourishment from images of these racialized others.

(Wade, 2001, p. 855)

These insights are apropos given the Uruguayan context described above – where some aspects of blackness are celebrated, while others are erased – warranting more thought about how blackness may “nourish” the nation. In the next section, I contend that attending to how racialized spaces are imagined and experienced, with the objective of seeing how they constitute subjectivities, can bring insights on this complex relationship.

**Studying Racialized Neighbourhoods**

Fascination with the racialized quarter of the city is not unique to Montevideo. Places inhabited by the racially marginalized often become infused with the mix of dread and excitement that accompanies notions of the Other (Adams, 2007; B. Anderson, 1991; Guano, 2003; Jaguaribe, 2004a; Nelson, 2002; C. Williams, 2008; Wilson, 2007).
Theorizing the links between culture, geography, and power with respect to ghettoized spaces is critical, given that these neighbourhoods may be on the one hand commodified, and on the other hand be the target of policing, evictions, and razings. New York’s Harlem, for instance, occupies a special place in local, national, and transnational imaginations, signifying black cultural renaissance and political agency, as well as poverty and danger (Pile, 1999; M. M. Taylor, 2002). Black ghettos throughout the U.S. are similarly stigmatized (Wilson, 2007).

Latin American societies were long thought to be more racially and spatially integrated than northern ones, due to the primacy of *mestizaje* as a model of national identity and to the lack of official segregation policies. As noted above, however, *mestizaje* was/is implicated in constructing racial hierarchies. In recent years, the geographic aspects of racialization have been noted in Latin American studies. In their introduction to *Race and nation in modern Latin America*, Nancy Appelbaum et al. (2003) point out that:

> Those regions that have been marked off as black and Indian (such as northeastern Brazil, highland Peru, or southern Mexico) have been labeled backward in relation to more modern, whiter regions (such as southern Brazil, coastal Peru, or northern Mexico). Regions identified as black or Indian, such as the Caribbean coast of Central America, have not been considered fully part of the nation. (Applebaum et al., 2003, p. 10)

Various studies confirm that throughout Latin America, race has often been defined regionally. In Peru, for instance, the mountains signify Indianness and the city signifies modernity and whiteness (De la Cadena, 1998). In Colombia and Ecuador, the Pacific coasts are associated with blackness (Rahier, 1998; Wade, 1998, 2000). Latin American urban studies, however, have tended to focus on class (Banck, 1986; A. Gilbert & Crankshaw, 1999; Klein, 2006; Lloyd-Sherlock, 1997; Morse & Hardoy, 1992; O’Hare & Barke, 2002), sometimes gender (Blondet, 1990; Craske, 1994) or social movements (Canel, 2001; Salman, 1994). The racial organization of the Latin American city, however, has been little studied. A few critical studies, however, show that even in Brazil – long thought to be one of the most racially integrated societies – race and geography define each other (Silva, 2001; Vargas, 2006). Brazilian *favelas* are at once viliified and romanticized, brutalized and exoticized (Adams, 2007; Godreau, 2002; Jaguaribe, 2004a; Silva, 2001; Vargas, 2006; C. Williams, 2008). Studies of the
criminalization of the *favelas*, in particular emphasize the imperative of attending to representational practices which render racialized spaces marginal (Silva, 2001; Vargas, 2006; discussed more fully in chapter one).

Also pertinent is the fact that racialized neighbourhoods are not only stigmatized. As has already been suggested, they are also sometimes rendered folkloric and exotic. In his study of San Antón, Puerto Rico, Isar Godreau (2002) indicates that the folklorization of black space distances blackness from the nation, an insight that is of course crucial to my thesis. This thesis shows, however, that the term distancing is not sufficient to explain the complex relationship between folklorized blackness and the nation’s whiteness. The *conventillo* is not merely ideologically distanced from the nation; it figures prominently as a space that actively produces and is produced through subjects, suggesting a deeper connection between black spaces, bodies, and differently racialized and gendered subjects. The focus on the “psychodyanmics of space” exposes the desires, fetishes, and disavowals that underpin the folklorization of space. Ghettoized, racialized spaces provoke intense feelings of both “disgust and desire” (Pile, 1996, p. 180). My thesis argues that these intense feelings are due to the role of racialized space in the negotiation of the racialized, sexualized, and gendered symbolic order. I build upon the growing scholarship that is concerned with the symbolics and politics of blackness in Latin America, particularly with respect to place (such as the aforementioned Godreau, Vargas, and Silva). Exploring the geographic, embodied, and subjective dimensions of blackness through the *conventillo* yields fruitful insights about the articulation of the nation through race, class, and gender.

In attending to the psychoanalytic and subjective aspects of space and blackness, I am in no way eliding the social or the political. On the contrary, this project foregrounds the role of understudied dynamics such as pleasure and fetishization in the shaping of race and place-based power relations. In the conclusion, I explain the significance of my findings given the importance of territorialized neighbourhood identities within the context of participatory citizenship, a significant mode of governance in Montevideo, throughout Latin America, and the world.

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6 I discuss Godreau (2002) at greater length in chapter one.
Summary of Methodology

Because of the way the conventillo unites themes of power, culture, race, geography, and identity, I began to investigate how this site might be organized through and organize social relations. Here I am drawing on cultural geography, which tells us that space is socially produced just as social relations are produced by the structuring of space (Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1989). In other words, places do not just exist. Their materiality is always mediated through meaning, power, and history. Simultaneously, the organization of space shapes social relations. Subjects come to know themselves and be known via their connection to specific spaces, just as spaces become constituted by their inhabitants. The geographical location of a group can be an indicator of the degree of citizenship rights that group enjoys (Isin & Siemiatycki, 2002). In addition, the way subjects experience their living space and other geographies is connected to their sense of national belonging and identity (McKittrick, 2000; Pile, 1996; Radcliffe, 1999a). Categories of meaning and classification including race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation interlock and are integral to this process.

Also critical to my thesis is the idea that space constitutes bodies. Heidi Nast and Steve Pile indicate that the body, space, and power are inextricable from each other:

Bodies and places, then, are made-up through the production of their spatial registers, through relations of power. Bodies and places are woven together through intricate webs of social and spatial relations that are made by; and make, embodied subjects.

(Nast & Pile, 1998, p. 4)

Bodies are defined through the spaces they inhabit and, geographies are defined through bodies, or by who is “imagined” to inhabit the space. “Place constructs its occupant’s body as the occupant gives meaning to place” (Mohanram, 1999, p. 200). Thus, when I refer to “embodiment,” I am invoking several ideas. First of all, to embody is to give a human body, or concreteness, to the disembodied. Therefore, I am referring to how abstract concepts such as “blackness” and “whiteness” produce meaning and come to mean through association with actual bodies, symbols, places, and objects. Secondly, I am referring to how bodies are taken to signify abstract and invisible qualities (such as morality, civility, etc.). I am referring to how racialized and gendered bodies are seen to
“embody” both places and characteristics that constitute them in a certain relationship to national belonging.

Constructing a framework that draws on cultural geography, as well as critical race, feminist poststructural, and postcolonial theory, I consider the relation between race and citizenship in Uruguay through the lens of narratives from and about the Afro-Uruguayan conventillos of Barrio Sur and Palermo. Citizenship, here, is defined as encompassing belonging: How is belonging constituted? Who belongs where in the nation?

My theoretical framework (described at length in chapter one) leads me to analyze the data guided by the following key questions:

- What meanings are associated with the Barrio Sur/Palermo conventillo? How does the conventillo constitute meaning?
- How was the conventillo organized by race, gender, class, sexuality, and nation?
- To what extent did this site itself come to constitute these categories, subjectivities, and also contestations?
- What is the role of this racialized space in the negotiation of subjectivity?
- What kinds of embodiments are constituted through the conventillo? That is, who is imagined to live in the conventillo? What characteristics are they imagined to embody?

Additionally, given the folklorization of these spaces and black culture I also ask:

- What does it mean to be considered a “folkloric” subject?  

The sociological commitment of my research is best expressed by Sonia Alvarez et al. who write of the significance of attending to meaning-making processes:

One of the most useful aspects of the poststructuralist understanding of culture in anthropology is its insistence on the analysis of production and signification, of meanings and practices, as simultaneous and inextricably bound aspects of social reality.

(Alvarez et al., 1998, p. 4)

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7 Thanks to Eva-Lyn Jagoe for pointing out this important question.
The inextricability of material and symbolic processes is foregrounded when we think of how bodies and subjects acquire meaning through place, and places come to mean through bodies. My project charts what Sarah Radcliffe and Sallie Westwood (1996, p. 27) refer to as “geographies of identity.” “Geographies of identity…can be defined as the senses of belonging and subjectivities which are constituted in (and which in turn act to constitute) different spaces and social sites” (Radcliffe & Westwood, 1996, p. 27). By considering the meanings that shaped and were shaped through the conventillo, I track the connections between the symbolic and the material place of the blackness within the city and the nation.

Pile (1996) stresses the significance of attending to the narration of the subject in relation to place:

What is at stake here is an appreciation of the intricate and dynamic ways in which narratives of space and self intertwine. These stories are about the ways in which people gain a sense of who they are, the ways in which space helps tell people their place in the world, and the different places that people are meant to be in the world.

(Pile, 1996, p. 6)

The idea of “one’s place in the world” is of course relevant to the study of citizenship and the theme of who belongs in the nation.

To summarize, I am interested in thinking about how the Afro-Uruguayan conventillo is a constitutive place in and of the nation. How do spatial arrangements express and constitute national belonging? How are processes of identification working through place? How are these processes enmeshed in reifying or contesting the racial hierarchy of the nation?

In the next section I provide an outline of the rest of the chapters.

**Chapter Summaries**

Chapter one describes my theoretical framework, methodology, and data. First I describe the key theoretical perspectives that frame my thesis: 1) the social production of space; 2) the relation between space, subjectivity, and the body; and 3) the embodiment of citizenship and belonging. Then I define the primary objects of analysis: 1) narrative; 2) experience; and 3) performance. Lastly, I summarize the data and how I analyze it.
utilizing tools from postcolonial studies, feminist poststructural theory, and performance theory.

Chapter two provides a brief history of the conventillos of Barrio Sur and Palermo. I trace their origins in the 19th century, showing how the concentration of Afro-Uruguayans in this area was related to slavery and abolition. This chapter establishes that conventillos provided affordable housing for many immigrant and Afro-Uruguayan families. While the conditions were often abysmal, these spaces also provided opportunities for building a sense of Afro-Uruguayan culture and identity, as well as working-class solidarity. The second half of this chapter provides further context for the conventillos by reviewing how other racialized spaces have been studied.

Chapter three enters the conventillo through what I call “narratives of the clotheslines.” I examine narratives that pertain to domestic work within the conventillos. I analyze these narratives to show the interplay between structural and material conditions, symbolic-discursive practices, and subjectivity and to foreground the restrictive social positioning of women who are marked by race and class. Lastly, I analyze autobiographical reflections, including those of performers Lagríma Ríos, Martha Gularte, and Rosa Luna. These narratives suggest how Afro-Uruguayan women are positioned with respect to domestic work and how they resist this positioning.

In chapter four I analyze an autobiographical text by white Uruguayan artist, Carlos Páez Vilaró (b. 1923). Páez Vilaró is an artist who has been very influential in representing the conventillo pictorially and in the national media. His text is pertinent because the artist epitomizes the national fascination with the conventillo’s blackness, and at the same time, he has contributed to the fascination. My analysis of Vilaró (2000) makes visible how white masculinity is constituted in relation to the conventillo.

Chapter five analyzes the performance of Rosa Luna (1937-1993), an Afro-Uruguayan vedette who became synonymous with Montevideo's annual carnival from the 1950s until her death in 1993. Born in the conventillo Medio Mundo, Rosa Luna became involved with candombe early on, and eventually became a national icon. In her later life, she was an ambassador of Uruguayan culture, performing for exiled audiences abroad. In this chapter, I reveal how gender, race, sexuality, and nation are articulated and entangled through the figure of Rosa Luna. Furthermore, I argue that her performance constituted
spatial and specular occasions that resonated with/and also disturbed the “symbolic order.” Her reception can be regarded as activating/evincing the desire for an archetypal black femininity within this white-identified and former slave society. At the same time, her performance contests the “invisibility” of blackness on the national stage.

Having established the folklorization and fetishization of the conventillo, chapter six begins by exploring what it means to be a folkloric subject. Specifically, I reflect upon several of the life histories contained in Historias de Exclusión: Afrodescendientes en el Uruguay (Porzecanski & Santos, 2006). This chapter concludes with two narratives of the evictions from a conventillo, which again connect the symbolic and material aspects of exclusion. Both narratives focus – in different ways – on the connection between racialized geographies, subjectivity, culture, and resistance.

A Word on Blackness and Afro-Uruguayanness

As I have already stated, I am starting from the premise that race, like class, gender, sexuality, and nation are socially constructed categories. To say that race is not an essential characteristic does not preclude the fact that racial categories map onto (but never neatly) shared histories, epistemologies, identities, and geographies. Because groups have been distinguished, managed, constituted, and define themselves within certain racial categories, there are convergences in lived experiences, geographies, histories, identities, cultures, and positionings within the national and transnational space. Thus, I use the terms black Uruguayan or Afro-Uruguayan (I use these terms interchangeably as they are used in contemporary self-identifications) to refer to a group that has a shared social history, while maintaining the notion that one cannot generalize about or delimit the “group” itself. The term Afro-Uruguayan itself is a recent construction, which emerged from the anti-racist movement that emerged in Montevideo in the 1980s, following the dictatorship (Rudolf, Maciel, & Rorra, 2005). It is also a reflection of pan-Afro-Latin and pan-African solidarity and identity (Whitten & Quiroga, 1998).

Lastly, as I proceed with my project I face the challenge of thinking about the ways that I am also engaged in producing knowledge about race. Of course blackness is not only a negative foil to whiteness, but also a position from which identities,
solidarities, and resistances are formed. I would not want to set up an easy opposition between dominant and resistant “blacknesses.” Instead I am proposing a reading of blackness that connects it to the “material conditions of possibility” from which it emerges (Hook, p. 526). I need to think about how it is possible to research, think and write about black and white subject positions, bodies and spaces without reifying the black/white binary that constitutes racial hierarchy, and without reifying the fetishization of blackness. Wade (1997, p. 15) reminds us that “the study of race is part of that history [of race production], not outside of it.” I need to proceed cautiously and think about the subject positions that I am bringing into being through my work.
Chapter One
Mapping Subjectivity and Belonging in Relation to Geography and the Body

Introduction to Theoretical Framework

As stated at the outset, my investigation focuses on how bodies, subjects, and national belonging are constituted through relations to the *conventillo*. To accomplish this requires a methodological framework that attends to the social construction of space and to the mutual production of spaces, bodies, and identities through race, class, gender, and sexuality. Based on this framework, my thesis investigates how the *conventillo* has been narrated and experienced through an analysis of autobiographical, literary, and media texts, as well as in interviews with nine key informants, and a carnival performance. My methodological framework is guided by the following tenets, which will be established in this chapter:

- space and social relations are co-constitutive; the organization of space is connected to power
- spatial and social relations are made through race, class, gender, and other socially constructed categories
- bodies, subjectivities, and spaces are constituted discursively and spatially
- belonging is a feature of citizenship
- a sense of national belonging is constructed in relation to place and in relation to the national ideal embodiment, as specified by the national narrative
- hierarchies of national belonging are thus constituted through discursive, spatial, and embodied practices

I begin by reviewing postcolonial scholarship that views identities are geographically constituted and geographies as constituted through discourse and representation. I then outline Lefebvre’s (1991) “production of space” perspective, which provides insights for understanding how space is lived, conceived, and perceived. This leads into a discussion of how psychoanalytic concepts of subjectivity are spatial; Freud and Lacan’s theories specify that a sense of self is achieved by locating the body in space (Pile, 1996). I then look at theorists who argue that the rational subject of Enlightenment
thought relied on conceptualizing a spatial relation, one which inferiorized bodies that were seen to be unable to escape their corporeality: racialized, gendered, sexualized bodies. Lastly, I show how national belonging is also defined through geography and embodiment. There is normative body that “embodies” nationhood and the nation is embodied in certain bodies and geographies.

Geographies of Identities

The idea that geographies are socially constituted, informing identities and power relations is present in postcolonial theory. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said (1979) coined the term “imaginative geographies,” to convey the relation between geography, power, and identity. Said famously argued that the “West” produced the “Orient” through literature various academic disciplines. Orientalism was an area of study that constructed an exotic and denigrating vision of the Middle East. For Said Orientalism was a discourse, a way of narrating the Other that also produced “Europe” and Europeans. The discourse of Orientalism was so powerful that it continues to inform contemporary reductive notions of the Middle East and Asia.

In *Remaking the nation: Place, identity and politics in Latin America*, Sarah Radcliffe and Sallie Westwood (1996) reflect on the powerful insights provided by Said. They describe the relation between space and belonging by suggesting there are “geographies of identities”:

> Geographies of identities draws from Said’s imaginative geographies a sense that structures of belonging, difference and spatial organization are constantly drawn up and peopled influencing the constitution of identity, in relation to an Other. Given the mutual embeddedness of sociality and spatiality, the geographies of identity are also conceived as racialized, gendered and class-based.
> (Radcliffe and Westwood, 1996, p. 27)

“Geographies of identities” exist at all scales: the local, national, global. Neighbourhoods, cities, nations, and continents are sources of identity and belonging, as well as sites of contestation and struggle over meaning and over who belongs. I build on this idea below when I discuss how geography is connected to national narratives, citizenship, and belonging.

Said and other postcolonial writers foreground that geographies are constituted through narratives in literature, history, science, as well as in personal accounts and
cartography (Kirby, 1996; M. L. Pratt, 1992; A. Rama, 1996). Mary Louise Pratt shows how widely read travel narratives, such as those of Alexander von Humboldt, “invented” Latin America for European readers. Humboldt’s books were based on his travels to Central and South America in the early 19th-century. Humboldt portrayed an image of vast, wild, and uninhabited landscapes. This conception was at odds with his actual experience. His travels relied on interactions with communities and guides every step of the way. Pratt, however, is not interested in the veracity of Humboldt’s account, but in how it produced an undifferentiated, natural “America” for European consumption and how this was related to the fashioning of “bourgeois subjectivity” (M. L. Pratt, 1992, p. 119). Yet, there were different actors imagining the continent. Pratt (1992, pp. 128-29) points to indigenous maps and journals that portray the same places as Humboldt, but where the landscape is clearly marked by human habitation, mining, and agriculture. Pratt theorizes that “contact zones” in the New World became places where “transcultural” exchanges took place, informing both dominant and subordinated cultures. What is important to note, however, is that power differentials shaped the construction of dominant or hegemonic narratives.

Angel Rama’s La Ciudad Letrada (The Lettered City) looks at the discursive influence of the Spanish, and later Creole, elites in the construction of Latin American cities. For Rama, the lettered city included the writers and intellectuals, who often occupied the role of politicians, bureaucrats, and law-makers. Throughout Spanish America, cities were hierarchically “imagined” before they were built (Rama, 1996, p. 6). Guided by directives from the Spanish Crown, the “lettered” elites planned cities where “the distribution of urban space reproduce[d] and confirm[ed] the desired social order” (Rama, 1996, p. 5). Rama explores the influence of the written word and “men of letters” on the design and function of urban centres throughout the continent. The ideals of the imagined city were never fully achieved, of course, but they motivated the urban landscape.8

8 As Jorge Hardoy (1992) indicates, following colonialism Latin American cities expanded quickly and often without central planning. Architectural theory and practices from Europe were imported with little regard for the reality of the local context. This resulted in the uneven and haphazard development of cities, with private investors often leading the way based on their own interests. Conti’s (1986) study of the development of social housing in Uruguay shows that the conventillos resulted from a convergence
Extending Rama’s analysis to Montevideo, we can see how the city’s layout evinced an evolving “desired social order.” During the colony, the citadel marked a clear boundary between the inside and outside and black bodies were spatially regulated. In the late 19th-century, city planners blueprinted hierarchy. Individual family units were built for workers in the meatpacking district of El Cerro (Conti, 1986). In Barrio Sur and Palermo, the conventillos were meant to house a family per room. By distributing certain types of housing in certain parts of the city, they charted the “where of race” and class. Rama’s work is significant because it shows the conjunction between power, discourse, the law, and built space.

The actual use and experience of space, however, cannot be entirely prescribed. Buildings and neighbourhoods may be designed with specific intentions, but the occupants and users also shape the space. In order to connect how spaces are conceived to how they are lived, experienced, and imagined, I turn to geographer Henri Lefebvre.

**Everyday Life and the Social Production of Space**

It is Lefebvre’s ability to link representation and imagination with the physical spaces of cities and to emphasize the dialectical relationship between identity and urban space that makes his work so attractive to many contemporary urban researchers. His work provides a conceptual framework through which the spatial practices of everyday life, including violence and protest, can be understood as central to the production and maintenance of physical spaces.

(McCann, 1999, p. 169)

In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre (1991) argues that space is socially produced just as social relations are produced by the structuring of space. Spaces are informed by, but cannot be reduced to, the structures that organize society. Subjects come to know themselves and be known via their connection to specific places; places are in turn constituted by their inhabitants. This connection will be illustrated in the next chapter when I discuss how the residents come to embody the slum. For Lefebvre, this is not an overdetermined relation. Spaces take on a life of their own and produce relations between people, practices, and other spaces. Simultaneously, subjects interact with their

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between state and private interests. There was a need for affordable housing and there was money to be made from cheaply made buildings that could be rented out to multiple tenants.
geographies. Lefebvre’s project is to foreground the co-constitutive role of space and social relations and to dispel the idea of space as a background for social action:

Social space is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products; rather, it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity – their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder.... Itself the outcome of past actions, social space is what permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others. (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 73)

Particularly useful is Lefebvre’s (1991, pp. 33-46) contention that there are three realms of social space that relate to how space is conceived (representation of space), perceived (spatial practice), and lived (representational space). I describe these characteristics here, drawing also on Eugene McCann, because they relate to the different aspects of the conventillo:

1) representation of space: Here the use of the term “representation” is very specific. For Lefebvre this denotes the way that a space has been formally conceived and represented by the powerful, for instance in maps and by city planners. McCann describes it as:

the space of planners and bureaucrats, constructed through discourse. This space always remains abstract since it is conceived rather than directly lived. It is only encountered through the understandings and abstractions contained in plans, codes, and designs that shape how we conceptualize ordered space.

(McCann, 1999, p. 172)

2) representational space: Representational space – or spaces of representation - refers to space as lived and experienced through the imagination. It refers to how spaces becoming meaningful, how subjects experience and imagine, the spaces they use and inhabit. To quote Lefebvre, it expresses the sense of

space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of “inhabitants” and “users,” but also of some artists and perhaps of those, such as a few writers and philosophers, who describe and aspire to do no more than describe. This is the dominated – and hence passively experienced – space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects. Thus representational spaces may be said, though again with certain exceptions, to tend towards more or less coherent systems of non-verbal symbols and signs.

(Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39)

The concept of representational spaces implies that the same physical space is experienced differently by different people and shaped by actors in ways that may
diverge from its “original” conception. McCann’s adds that, “the works of artists, photographers, filmmakers, and poets may be representational spaces that, through their uses of symbolism, construct counter-discourses and thus open up the possibility to think differently about space.” Thus, representational space also refers to spaces where spaces can be imagined, such as films, literature, and paintings.

3) spatial practice: For Lefebvre, spatial practice refers to the practices that shape and are shaped through spaces. Critically, social practice is not merely the dominant practices that structure a particular spatial arrangement. Rather:

The spatial practice of a society secretes the society’s space; it propounds and presupposes it, in a dialectical interaction; it produces it slowly and surely as it masters and appropriates it. From the analytic standpoint, the spatial practice of a society is revealed through the deciphering of its space. (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 38)

Thus, the triad of conceived, lived, and perceived space is dialectical. Representations of space may lead to certain spatial practices; these practices may “secrete” their own spaces, and also inform representational spaces. McCann elucidates how spatial practices interact with representations of space and representational space in the city:

These practices—the everyday activities of life—continually mediate between the two forms of social space, working within the bounds of the conceived abstract spaces of planners and architects while simultaneously being shaped and shaping individuals’ perceptions and uses of space. While planners may designate the downtown streets to be public, individuals’ perceptions may induce them to use the streets in different ways, feeling out of place in some parts of downtown or unsafe in others. (McCann, 1999, pp. 122-23)

Lefebvre’s theorization of space allows that spaces and places in the city can be conceptualized as signs, but they are far more than that. Just as the imagining of the city shapes its layout, the city’s geography permits certain modes of production, as well as ways of being, feeling, and relating, but these relations are not overdetermined. Spatial, like social relations, are always being contested, reshaped, and resisted (Lefebvre, 1991; Smith, 1993). The idea that representational spaces are “overlaid” upon one another is particularly evocative. Again, throughout this thesis, the Afro-Uruguayan conventillo is shown to contain or evoke several “imaginative geographies,” which speak of the entanglement of race, class, sexuality, and gender. According to Pile
Representational spaces embody complex symbolisms, which have conscious and unconscious resonances and are therefore linked to “underground social life,” which take on meaning only in the process of exchange and as part of a system of differences; and, because meaning is associated with value, it is here that power relations are at their most visible.

(Pile, 1996, p. 157)

This thesis investigates the “conscious and unconscious resonances” generated by/through the conventillo. Following Lefebvre, McCann, and Pile, I am proposing that the conventillo can be studied by attending to: 1) the representation of space: Through its design (including the many laundry sinks, many families cramped in small spaces, and a central courtyard), the conventillo’s conception prescribed certain types of labour and ways of relating. This will become evident in chapter three when I discuss the conventillo clotheslines; 2) representational space: In a later part of this chapter, I explain how I examine narratives to reveal how the conventillo was both lived and imagined; and 3) spatial practices: I will refer to how subjects’ sense of self is negotiated through practices such as laundering and walking into the conventillo. Lefebvre draws attention to, although he does not explicitly work out, how space is experienced in relation to the body and the psyche (Pile, 1996). I now turn to theorists who elaborate on these connections.

**Subjectivity, Space, and Psychoanalysis**

Psychoanalysis is, after all, a spatial discipline.

(Pile, 1996, p. 77)

Freudian psychoanalysis has been roundly critiqued for its patriarchal and colonial or racist underpinnings (for instance Bergner, 2005; Kirby, 1996; Mohanram, 1999; Nast, 2000; Newman, 2002). Nonetheless, even critics have found it useful to draw upon both Freud and Lacan to understand the development of racialized and gendered subjectivities. The psychoanalytic attention to the subject as formed in relation to boundaries around the body and in relation an Other is particularly relevant for theorizing the spatiality of social hierarchies. Both Freud and Lacan relate the attainment of a sense of self to an awareness of the how the individual is located with respect to others and to the external world (Pile, 1996). According to Freudian theory, a notion of the self begins to develop when the infant realizes that he is separate from his mother (Freud’s is a
masculinist account). For Freud, this experience is traumatic; it instills anxieties and desires. The Oedipus Complex, discussed at greater length in chapter five, results from when the (male) child makes the further realization that his mother “lacks” a penis. This precipitates castration anxiety in the boy, which is resolved when he disavows the mother and identifies with the father. For Freud, these dramas explain how children learn normative gender identification within a family setting.

Lacan draws attention to importance of the mirror stage in the development of subjectivity. In this stage, the infant sees its reflection on a surface and is faced with the conundrum of a self that is not itself. Lacan holds that at this stage the child begins to experience him/herself as a whole, rather than parts (toes, fingers, etc.) and is able to gaze at itself as others do, but not quite. At the same time, the gap between the self and the mirror provokes anxieties and desires. Pile points out that Lacan’s formulation is useful for the way that it understands subjectivity as being framed within the orders of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. Briefly, the Imaginary corresponds to the register of images (whether, unconscious, perceived, imagined). The Symbolic refers to the hierarchy of signifiers, which is formed through culture. The Real is “inarticulable” and only approachable, that which falls between the gaps – or cannot be apprehended – through either images or symbols (Pile, 1996, p. 138).

Pile (1996, p. 156) finds parallels between the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic, and Lefebvre’s representations of space, representational space, and spatial practices. Here I focus on the symbolic order, because it is most closely linked to the realm of the social and power. For Lacan, the symbolic is an “order of signifiers,” and it is culturally, historically, and spatially inflected (Pile, 1996, p. 138). It is the means by which subjects learn of their place within a society’s hierarchical structure. The Oedipus complex is reframed as the process through which children learn about patriarchy, the Law of the Father, which, in Lacanian terms, is signified through the phallus. For Lacan the symbolic order is connected to the “entry into language,” which is also the entry into “culturally determined sanctions and prohibitions” (Pile, 1996, p. 139). This is significant because “while Freud stresses the child’s (boy’s or girl’s) experience of its relationship with its mother and father, Lacan argues that the child must find a place within culture’s territories of meaning and identity – and power” (Pile, 1996, p. 131). It can also be seen,
however, that Lacan – while placing a greater emphasis on society’s mediation of subjectivity – maintains gender as the primary system of subject differentiation. Gwen Bergner (2005) disrupts this emphasis by analyzing the “primal scenes” of psychoanalysis (such as the oedipal moment) alongside the “stock scenes” of double consciousness present in African-American narratives. This allows Bergner (2005, p. xxvi) to argue that “the symbolic order…institutes intersecting regimes of racial and sexual difference.” I mobilize this significant insight in chapter five, when I argue that a performance emanating from the conventillo (Rosa Luna, the vedette’s) can be understood as both embodying and disrupting the symbolic order.

Kathleen Kirby argues that the psychoanalytic account of the self as bounded and separate from Others and its environment describes the formation of a historically specific subject, the masculine bourgeois subject. For Kirby (1996, p. 45) “the Cartesian subject, the Enlightenment individual, the autonomous ego of psychoanalysis: all appear to be reducible to [the] same graphic schema.” The schema involves a subject who is discrete from his (this subject is implicitly male) environment and those around him. As such, he is able to objectively observe and “dominate” his surroundings. She summarizes:

Graphically, the “individual” might be pictured as a closed circle: its smooth contours ensure its clear division from its location, a well as assuring its internal coherence and consistency. Outside lies a vacuum in which objects appear within their own bubbles, self-contained but largely irrelevant to this self-sufficient ego. Will, Thought, perception might be depicted as rays issuing outward to play over the surface of Objects, finally rejecting them in order to reaffirm its own primacy. Objects that are accepted are pulled in through the walls of the subject and are assimilated, restoring the interior to homeostasis.

(Kirby, 1996, p. 45)

Kirby argues that such a conceptualization of the self with respect to space is critical for the formation of a dominant subjectivity. Kirby exemplifies her argument by analyzing the diaries of two early explorers of the Americas, Samuel de Champlain and Cabeza de Vaca. For these men, mapping became a means of asserting control over their environment and for attaining a sense of self. Their identities “crumbled” and they were “lost” when they enter their “surroundings” and are not able to maintain the cartographer’s distance from the landscape (Kirby, 1996, p. 48). Dominating the land and its inhabitants relied on a “position of cool distance.” The inability to “distinguish ‘self’ from ‘other’” was a feature of the “primitive” man (Kirby, 1996, p. 49). Kirby finds a
parallel between the narratives of these explorers and an account of postmodern space from literary critic Fredric Jameson. Like the explorers, this subject is disoriented when he encounters a blurring of boundaries.

While Kirby theorizes the “Enlightenment” or bourgeois subject, in the next section I turn to scholars who have considered how Enlightenment thinking informed the perceived relationship between the black body and space. This discussion indicates that race – interlocking with gender, sexuality, and class – is produced in relation to space.

**Space, the Body, and Race**

Geography speaks through bodies. It is on the body that the complexity and ambiguity of history, race, racism and place are inscribed.

(McKittrick, 2000a, p. 226)

If the corporeal/bodily ego provides perspective for the white man, as Freud and Lacan would have it, the black man is pure representation for Fanon. The black man is hypervisible yet invisible simultaneously, but he himself lacks “perspective.” Instead he functions to grant a perspective to the white man. If the corporeality of (white) man grants him equality and political space, and if the civil state is the metaphor par excellence of the rational bent of man, as Locke espouses in his political philosophy, for Fanon this very corporeality of black man and his particular sense of his body prevents them from achieving this state of equality. At best, it locates his alterity (otherness), but an alterity constructed precisely by Western ontology/epistemology.

(Mohanram, 1999, pp. 26-27)

In “The fact of blackness,” Fanon (1967) provides a powerful articulation of blackness as an idea that inscribes itself on the body and the subject. As Gwen Bergner (1995, p. 76) notes, Fanon “de-essentializes both race and psychoanalytic models of subject formation; psychoanalysis becomes a tool with which to evaluate relations of power and cultural hegemony.” Examining his own reactions, Fanon finds that under the white gaze, his awareness of his body increases: “I know that if I want to smoke, I shall have to reach out take my right arm and the pack of cigarettes lying on the table” (Fanon, 1967, p. 111). He feels he is being constituted from without: “the white man…had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories” (Fanon, 1967, p. 111). As Rhadika Mohanram indicates, Fanon’s observations highlight how the black man “functions to grant a perspective to the white man,” but he himself is left without perspective.
In Black body: Women, colonialism, and space, Mohanram (1999) shows how the black body functions in Western discourse to grant “perspective,” rationality, and universality to whiteness. It is a spatial relation. She begins by tracing the modern concept of identity to the works of Descartes and Locke. These philosophers, she argues, connected human identity to control over the body. In Descartes the body is opposed to reason. Based on this binary, Locke theorizes “bodily identity as necessary to separate man from beast in the construction of civil society within liberal humanist thought” (Mohanram, 1999, p. 31). For Locke, bodily identity requires “one fitly organized body,” and the “same contained life” (Locke as cited in Mohanram, p. 31). “The ‘man of consciousness’ has to separate himself from the bestial body” (Mohanram, 35). Within this logic, what distinguishes human consciousness is that it is beyond corporeality; rationality is disembodied. Mohanram notes that this rational subject is defined in contrast to those who lack bodily control. Locke accomplishes this by turning to a story about a parrot that speaks, but has no human consciousness. For Mohanram, this incongruous story is telling. It is an avowal that there is difference, but a disavowal that it is the subject constructing difference. The disavowal is crucial because

an admission of difference would rob consciousness of its hierarchical status. The disavowal of difference is central to the validity of the discourse of development/evolution; as long as the latter underpins the logic of identity, the Lockean subject can avoid being reminded of his own body and his bestial materiality.

(Mohanram, 1999, p. 38)

A superior consciousness that relies on disembodiment requires a denial of its own corporeality by displacing it onto others. Like Kirby, Mohanram notes that there is a continuity between the Enlightenment subject, who is capable of reason, and the Freudian subject who needs to define his corporeal boundaries in relation to his environment. Reading through the “interstices of Locke and Freud,” Mohanram (1999, p. 28) finds that difference is displaced onto, or made through, the black body. Both thinkers show a discomfort with the body.

In their works the body moves from its status of being material to being a notion, and eventually being a mere trace, the existence of which must be read in the spoor it leaves behind, the spoor of their arguments. The body just will not go

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9 Mohanram is referring to John Locke’s (1690) An essay concerning human understanding.
away. It is bestial. The body narcissistically fixated on its materiality and physicality is a pervert, a woman, a black.  

(Mohanram, 1999, p. 50)

Difference, the lack of consciousness, is marked upon those who, due to “social relationships of domination and exploitation,” are visibly “embodied” (Mohanram, 1999, p. 39)

In a further move, Locke’s discourse of development simultaneously suggests that the marked body – marked through race, gender or poverty – a product of traits internal to the body, just as the beast is inhuman because of its body. The bestial, poor or black marked body cannot transcend itself to consciousness.  

(Mohanram, 1999, p. 38)

Mohanram’s next step is to trace how the black body is marked and constrained because of its imagined relation to space. Mohanram notes that there is a long history of imagining the black body as anchored to its place of origin. This body is therefore out of place when it moves. She points to the immobility of the black body in Claude Lévi-Strauss’s distinction between the “native” bricoleur and the metropolitan engineer (Mohanram, 1999, p. 21). The bricoleur, according to Lévi-Strauss, learns only from the environment, whereas the engineer is capable of inference and abstraction. While, Lévi-Strauss does not posit a hierarchy between one and the other, it is implicit. The bricoleur is limited to what his “native” geography will permit, whereas the engineer operates in the realm of universal knowledge. Through a binary logic, the black body is confined to its body and space and whiteness is disembodied. Thus whiteness comes to mean rationality, universality, and mobility.

Mohanram’s argument resonates with Silva’s (2001) analysis of how race operates within the Brazilian nation. Silva’s analysis derives from an examination of an episode of police terror in impoverished, racialized favela in Rio de Janeiro. In a review of press coverage of the events, she finds that the discourse of universalism – within the context of the modern nation – makes race practically unnameable as a factor in the violence. This silence insidiously reifies the idea that it is black spaces and black bodies themselves that embody immorality and illegality, thus justifying racist terror. Silva argues that this is possible because, following Enlightenment thought, blackness, black

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10 Mohanram is building upon Arjun Appadurai’s (1988) argument about the “incarceration” of the native.
bodies and spaces stand in for the limits of the modernity and universality. Silva (2001, p. 427) contends that “the primary effect of the power of race has been to produce universality itself” (author’s emphasis). Silva notes that this discourse is also present in social theory. The early sociology of race, she argues, conceived of “subaltern conditions as an effect of their race difference. In this movement, blackness was constructed to signify this ambiguous territory which, while located within the boundaries of universality, would consistently signify that which belongs to its outside” (Silva, 2001, p. 426). For Silva, there is continuity in the way that blackness signifies the limits of universal humanity, which is evinced in the treatment and representation of the favelados:

Bodies and places in Rio de Janeiro can be read as materialisations of the strategies of intervention deployed in different moments of the analytics of raciality, whose appropriation in attempts to provide a map of the modern Brazilian space resulted in the production of blackness to signify the domain of social degeneracy, pathology, and illegality.

(Silva, 2001, pp. 440-41)

While Mohanram makes an argument for the conceptual deployment of blackness, and Silva tracks the material effects of this conception, other feminist scholars theorize how the slave trade positioned black woman’s body within the Black Atlantic. M. Nourbese Philip (1997) and Katherine McKittrick (2000a; 2006) argue that black woman’s body was turned into a literal “site” or “place, which reproduced oppression. Philip poignantly describes the brutal sexual commodification of black women’s bodies:

The space between Black woman’s legs becomes. The place. Site of oppression – vital to the cultivation and continuation of the outer space in a designated form – the plantation machine.

(Philip, 1997, p. 77)

Building on Philip, McKittrick (2000a, p. 227) contends that “Black women are positioned as colonized bodies, static wombs and spaces. Because of this black women become bodies/products that continually make, remake and articulate modernity through silence and subjugation.” Philip and McKittrick point out that the reverberations of this problematic positioning continue to be felt today.

Having charted the historical and theoretical foundations of white bourgeois subjectivity and the “black body,” and specifically black woman’s body, I now turn to building a connection between the body and citizenship.
Citizenship, Belonging, and National Embodiment

Citizenship can be seen as the status of belonging or pertaining to a community (often, but not necessarily nor exclusively, a country), where part of the definition of that community involves drawing a boundary line between those inside and those outside.

(Taylor and Wilson, 2004, p. 155)

One does not simply or ontologically “belong” to the world or to any group within it. Belonging is an achievement at several levels of abstraction.

(Bell, 1999, p. 3)

Citizenship and national belonging are geographic because they imply a relationship between individuals and a specified territory. Lucy Taylor and Fiona Wilson (2004) indicate that belonging involves drawing boundaries. Combining insights from sociology and feminist geography, this section argues that a complex interlocking of discourse, geography, embodiment, and practice mark out a hierarchy of national belonging.

The national narrative defines the ideal embodiment of the nation, that is who embodies the ideal citizen according to privileged race, class, gender, sexuality and other characteristics (Alonso, 1988; Hage, 1998; Radcliffe, 1999a; Sharp, 1996). This goes hand in hand with a view that the nation itself is not a “naturally” existing category, but is a fiction that is produced through discursive and material practices (as discussed in the introduction, see Alonso, 1994; B. Anderson, 1991; Bhabha, 1994; Radcliffe & Westwood, 1996). Sarah Radcliffe draws attention to how national narratives define a relationship between the nation and the body:

National narratives of progress and tradition are inscribed upon bodies; national belonging departs from, and returns to, the body. Yet belonging, and narratives of national and personal identity, are differentially available to women and men, to different classes, to ethnic groups and so on…

(Radcliffe, 1999a, p. 224)

Radcliffe (1999a, p. 215) argues that “the power relations of the nation state and ideologies of nationhood entail particular national systems of corporeal production, systems that vary across time and space.” This means that national belonging is connected to specific embodiments (how the nation is embodied through national narratives, ideology) as well as how people experience themselves through relations to place and how they are embodied through constructions of race, class, and gender.
Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu, Ghassan Hage (1998) refers to the embodied aspects of belonging as “national capital.” National capital can encompass physical traits such as phenotype, hair colour, and apparel, as well as cultural comportment, language proficiency and other practices. In Australia, for instance, being blond, Australian-born, and English-speaking would represent a high degree of national capital and national belonging. In this schema, factors are differentially weighted, so that a more recent white-skinned immigrant trumps being a long time, dark-skinned resident. Furthermore, everyday practices reinforce the idea that some belong more than others. Hage cites as an example the removal of a head-scarf from a Muslim woman’s head in Australia. He understands this action as an attempt to mark the aggressor as inside, and the victim as outside, the nation. Although official citizenship grants legal status within the nation, “practical-cultural national acceptance at a communal, everyday level” is not guaranteed by “institutional-political acceptance” (Hage, 1998, p. 51). Practical-cultural acceptance refers to the everyday practices and experiences that make people feel that they rightfully belong (or not). Hage (1998, p. 51) stresses that national belonging is a matter of degree and distinguishes it from citizenship “to capture all the subtleties of the differential modalities of national belonging as they are experienced within society.” He elaborates on the meaning of national belonging:

In the daily life of the nation, there are nationals who, on the basis of their class or gender or ethnicity, for example, practically feel and are made to feel to be more or less nationals than others, without having to be denied, or feel they are denied, the right to be national as such. The either/or, inclusion or exclusion conception of national belonging is paradoxically less present in everyday popular conceptions of the nation than it is among social analysts. People strive to accumulate nationality. They recognise themselves as more national than some people and less national than others. They are also recognised by others in a similar fashion.

(Hage, 1998, p. 52)

In this framework, the nation is understood as mediating as a relationship between the territory and the body. A stronger link between the body and the national ideal leads to a stronger entitlement and access to citizenship.

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, Latin American national narratives – even those that base themselves on mestizaje – privilege whiteness as a national ideal. What cannot be overlooked, however, is that although racialized or economically
marginalized people may be largely excluded from the national ideal, they also embody
the “people,” or the “folk.” Homi Bhabha (1994, p. 145) identifies this as one of the
central ambivalences of the postcolonial nation; national narratives need, yet disavow, the
people. In Latin America, the “people” or the “popular” class are terms that broadly refer
to the working class, the poor, and/or the people of the nation. Néstor García Canclini, as
well as Jesús Martín-Barbero (1987) point to the multiple and sometimes mystifying
effects of these terms. García Canclini (1995, p. 148) reminds us that “the people” help
define the nation through their folkloric ways. As an example, he points to how
indigenous artifacts are used in Mexican museums to “stage” the national through the
popular. At the same time, he notes that “the people of interest are of interest as
legitimators of bourgeois hegemony” (García Canclini, 1995, pp. 147-48). In other
words, “the people” can help to define the nation, but their inclusion is limited. This was
already indicated in the introduction with respect to how discourses of mestizaje position
racialized people within the nation. In addition the cultural practices of racialized groups
– such as música tropical in Colombia and samba in Brazil – may enhance the national
identity (Wade, 2000). The next two studies discussed below show the feelings of
unbelonging experienced by subjects who are perceived/perceive themselves as outside
of the national ideal.

Radcliffe illustrates the unevenness of belonging in relation to embodiment in a
study of mestizo identity in Ecuador. Radcliffe interviewed Ecuadorean men and women
who would usually be identified as mestizo/a by others and asked them how they
identified racially. Radcliffe found that men were far more likely declare a mestizo
identity than women from a similar social background. The women identified as white or
grudgingly acknowledged being mestiza. Radcliffe believes that this is related to the
gendered embodiment of the nation. In Ecuador, the proclaimed national ideal is the male
mestizo figure, yet in a hierarchy that privileges the white part of the “mixture.” For men
– who have a greater insertion in the national/public sphere via their jobs, military
service, etc. – interpellation into the national category of mestizo is more straightfoward.
It entails identifying with the body of the normative citizen. Idealized images of
Ecuadorean femininity, on the other hand, are of white, bourgeois women. Within
modern patriarchal nations, woman’s role within the family is to reproduce the national
culture (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992). Radcliffe hypothesizes that in order to maximize their children’s future opportunities, *mestiza* women are best to transmit whiteness. For women this is a double edged sword, since it means that they are valued as reproducers of the nation, as long as they are faithful to the race. In this literal embodiment of nationhood, what is at stake is a woman’s respectability and therefore her relational positioning and power. Her sexuality is always suspect and has the potential to “betray” the national race. Although this seems incongruous, given that the *mestizo* is a mix, it must be remembered that “mixing” implies two elements (at least), and this means that there needs to be a “pure” element (Wade, 2005).

McKittrick (2000) teases out the relation between national belonging, geography, and racialized subjects in Toni Morrison’s (1994) *The Bluest Eye*. Her analysis illustrates how individuals experience themselves as less than citizens through their interaction with different spaces and with the nation’s ideal embodiment. She foregrounds Morrison’s use of minute details to signal relations between the racialized, gendered body, space, and the nation. *The Bluest Eye* narrates the life of a young black girl (Pecola) in Lorain, Ohio in 1941. Pecola learns of her place in the city and the nation through her daily journeys across town. As she walks, she experiences geographies of exclusion. She notices that homes are differentially impoverished. The darkest skinned people have the most humble homes; the homes of white families are comfortable, spacious, and clean. In public spaces, billboards and toy dolls pronounce a white, national aesthetic that mark Pecola as ugly and distance her body from the “national” one. Pecola longs for a blond haired, blue-eyed doll (and for blue eyes herself), but once she gets one, her longing is unfulfilled. She drinks voraciously from a Shirley Temple cup, not because of her physical thirst, but because of her thirst for the comfort, cleanliness and pleasure that Shirley Temple embodies, and from which Pecola is permanently excluded. The doll, the cup, and Shirley Temple, however, embody more than comfort. They embody whiteness and nation.

The nation is also represented in the text as a little girl, or doll, with blonde hair and blue eyes. Dolls are given to Claudia and her sister at Christmas and are said to represent their fondest wishes, greatest pleasures and standards of normality. (McKittrick, 2000, p. 132)
In this passage McKittrick draws out the intangible aspects that mark national belonging. For the two black girls, Pecola and Claudia, the nation is embodied through symbols that are all around them, yet out of reach: blonde hair, white houses, Shirley Temple, and the saucer. They can only brush up against these symbols to be reminded that they are excluded by their black bodies, or by how blackness (and therefore unbelonging) is embodied by them. “Their access to nation and their definition of nation (which is age-specific) is imaginary in that they look toward it but can never embody it. The girls purchase and hold replicas of the nation in their hands, thus reinscribing their place ‘outside’ the nation” (McKittrick, 2000, p. 132). McKittrick notes that resistance is also present within this narrow, racialized space. Claudia does not allow herself to be seduced by the doll. Instead she proclaims her love for her friend’s unborn, black child “just to counteract the universal love of white baby dolls, Shirley Temples and Maureen Peals” (Morrison, as cited in McKittrick, 2000, p. 131).

For McKittrick, Morrison is tapping into the subjective experience of the body and place as they are organized by race, gender, class, and nation. The novel evokes how “the experience of being black (re)defines how space, place, home and nation are materially and specifically emotionally located an perceived” (McKittrick, 2000, p.129). Racial exclusion, is produced through hierarchical geographies, histories of oppression and national embodiments that demarcate longing and belonging.

So far, I have outlined a theoretical framework that connects space, embodiment, citizenship, and national belonging. Next, I describe how I apply this framework to the data examined in this thesis.

**Research Methodology: Analyzing the Relation Between the Subject and Space**

The problem is to understand not only the dialectic between the subject and the social, but also the various ways in which space is implicated in this dialectic. The difficulty I have identified is that the dialectic is itself part of the problem of understanding the relationship between the subject, the social and space. I have hinted that the subject is not one thing, neither is the social and nor is space, that if there are dialectics then they may be of different kinds and orders, and that these relationships may be multiple, interrelated and dynamic.

(Pile, 1996, p. 69)
Lefebvre’s formulation that space is shaped and experienced through the imagination, symbols, and practice is key to this thesis. I am connecting the theoretical understandings developed so far to study 1) the “lived experience” of the conventillo, specifically, how subjects experience themselves in relation to the conventillo and the nation; and 2) how the conventillo is imagined; what kinds of meanings are produced through the conventillo? As I stated earlier, these issues relate to Lefebvre’s conception of representational space, as it connects with spatial practice (space as perceived), and the representation of space (space as conceived). Thus I will be forging connections between how the space was originally conceived and how it was experienced by both residents and non-residents. In addition, following theorists such as Pile, Kirby, and Mohanram, I assume that subjectivity is formed in relation to conceptions of space and actual places. What needs to be further worked out, however, is an actual method for investigating the connections between subjectivity, the “experience” of space, and social relations.

Various theorists have turned to autobiographical narratives, interviews, and literature to study this relationship (Kirby, 1996; McKittrick, 2000; Radcliffe, 1999a; Theweleit, 1977). This is the approach that I take, studying the symbolic place of the Afro-Uruguayan conventillo of Barrio Sur and Palermo through literary and autobiographical accounts of the space, as well as through media texts. In addition, in chapter five, I also analyze a particular performance from the conventillo and its public reception. Therefore the primary objects of analysis are 1) autobiographical narratives, whether they are gleaned from texts or interviews; 2) literature; and 3) performance.

Theorizing Subjectivity, Narrative and Experience

If reality comes to us in the form of narratives, narrative is a crucial medium that connects subjects to social relations.

(Hossfeld, 2005, p. 6)

Throughout this thesis I use the term “narrative” interchangeably with “account,” or “story,” to refer to a retelling of experience, to an autobiographical reflection, or to a literary text. In choosing to study narratives, I recognize that people organize their life
experiences through known storylines and discourses. Of course, because of the framework I have set out, I am not arguing that individuals come to know themselves solely through narrative. As I have already stated, the “lived experience” of space, spatial practice, and how bodies come to mean through space are key to an individual’s sense of self. This was vividly demonstrated by Fanon. What I am arguing is that the study of narratives of place is one way of grasping lived experience and the negotiation of subjectivity. As Pile puts it:

What is at stake here is an appreciation of the intricate and dynamic ways in which narratives of space and self intertwine. These stories are about the ways in which people gain a sense of who they are, the ways in which space helps tell people their place in the world, and the different places that people are meant to be in the world.

(Pile, 1996, p. 6)

J. Amos Hatch and Richard Wisniewski surveyed narrative and life history scholars to define what narrative means in terms of research. They find that it encompasses several concepts. Narrative can refer to: 1) the retelling of a single event; 2) a particular communication structure that involves a plot, a beginning, a middle, and an end; and 3) a common storyline that follows a familiar theme (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995). The first meaning is perhaps self-apparent. The second meaning of narrative can refer to “proper stories,” such as Cinderella. Yet, individuals often tell of their experiences and histories using similar structures. Yvonna Lincoln believes that this is because:

We make sense of our lives not in terms of “factoids,” but rather in terms of stories we tell about ourselves and our significant others, and the meanings that are implicit in those stories, particularly the meanings which we ourselves have made of the events of our lives.

(Yvonna Lincoln in Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995, p. 115)

Individuals remember and make sense of their lives and worlds through stories.

The relationship between experience, its narration (or representation), and knowledge production has been problematized by feminist poststructural scholars. Joan Scott critiques the invocation of experience as a foundational category upon which we build knowledge:

When experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual subject (the person who had the experience or the historian who recounts it) becomes the bedrock of evidence upon which explanation is built. Questions
about the constructed nature of experience, about how subjects are constituted as
different in the first place, about how one’s vision is structured – about language
(or discourse) and history – are left aside. The evidence of experience then
becomes evidence for the fact of difference, rather than a way of exploring how
difference is established, how it operates, how and in what ways it constitutes
subjects who see and act in the world.

(Scott, 1992, p. 25)

Scott emphasizes that experiential narratives are constructions that are the
products of their historical, discursive, and political contexts. This does not mean that
they are not “true.” Scott is contesting positivist notions of truth and knowledge
altogether. She argues that instead of using experience as “the origin of our explanation,”
we instead think about experience as “that which we seek to explain, that about which
knowledge is produced.” This reframing of experience does not invalidate its use, but
rather requires a conceptual shift: “It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects
who are constituted through experience” (Scott, 1992, p. 25). Scott observes that
narrative and discourse are key to the study of experience because “[s]ubjects are
constituted discursively, experience is a linguistic event (it doesn’t happen outside
established meanings), but neither is it confined to a fixed order of meaning” (Scott,
1992, p. 34).

In analyzing experience, or the narration of experience we need to attend “to the
historical processes that, through discourse, position subjects and produce their
experiences” (Scott, 1992, p. 25). The study of subjectivity, or how individuals come to
know themselves through experience, can be very revealing. Linda Alcoff (2001, p. 272)
suggests that studying “first-person memoirs and rich descriptions of racial
experience…might be tapped for theoretical analysis.” Because identities and experience
are organized (but not determined) by the hierarchies in which they are embedded, we
can look to autobiographical narratives as a source of information about the productivity
of race.

This approach to experience and narrative owes much to Foucault’s articulation of
the connections between discourse, knowledge, subjectivity and power. In a series of
works, Michel Foucault (1972; 1977; 1980b; 1982) set out that dominant discourses
determine what can count as knowledge. Stuart Hall (1997) powerfully summarizes this
perspective:
Discourse defines and produces the objects of our knowledge. It governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others….Meaning and meaningful practice is therefore constructed within discourse.

(S. Hall, 1997, p. 44)

For instance, the rise of psychology as a social science, Foucault (1967) argues, was connected to the shift in classification of indigent people as mad and led to their institutionalization. And, psychology itself was constituted through other prominent discourses of the time. So the body and the subject are produced within a specific historical context.

Bronwyn Davies (2000) offers a way of framing autobiographical narratives so that they are not taken as foundational, but are understood as connected to systems of knowledge production. Davies argues that we come to understand ourselves through narratives or storylines that draw upon available discourses. Here she is building upon Foucault’s (1972; 1977; 1980b; 1982) conception that discourse constructs knowledge and how we know the world. For Davies (2000, p. 57), “stories are the means by which events are interpreted, made tellable, or even liveable. All stories are understood as fictions, such fictions providing the substance of lived reality.” A subject is positioned through and positions him/herself through available storylines. So for instance, one available storyline for schoolgirls is that girls are not good at math. For Davies, such a storyline has the power to shape a notion of the self, particularly if a girl feels interpellated by that particular narrative. Yet this is not an overdetermined process. Davies and Ron Harré (2000) further elaborate that we are both positioned and positioning subjects:

The constitutive force of each discursive practice lies in its provision of subject positions. A subject position incorporates both a conceptual repertoire and a location for persons within the structure of rights for those who use that repertoire. Once having taken up a particular position as one’s own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, storylines, and concepts that are made relevant within the particular discursive practices in which they are positioned. At least a possibility of notional choice is inevitably involved because there are many and contradictory discursive practices that each person could engage in. Among the products of discursive practices are the very persons who engage in them.
Davies and Harré thus provide a way of thinking about autobiographical narrative that connects it to experience and the social context. Experience is not ignored; it is apprehended through a subject’s “presence within the collectivity, albeit a collectivity that constitutes itself through discourses in which the individual experiencing subject is made the primary focus” (Davies, 2000, p. 31).

While I draw on the Foucauldian notion of the subject and knowledge, I am also supplementing it with the psychoanalytic insights provided earlier in the chapter, those tools that make visible the negotiation of the self through the body, space, and boundaries. When I began this thesis, I was doing discourse analysis. As I began to analyze the data, however, I found that this perspective was not enough to adequately account for the dynamics that I was seeing. Therefore, I turned to psychoanalytic tools (described above), which allow me to get at aspects of racialization that are not only discursive, those aspects that are affective and embodied.

Now, I return to the main questions that I am addressing through the data: What meanings are produced through the conventillo? How do subjects come to know themselves and be known through their relation to the Afro-Uruguayan conventillo? Through the exploration of autobiographical (as well as literary and other) narratives, I am attending to how “people gain a sense of who they are” and “the different places that people are meant to be.”

To analyze the data, I have found it useful to refer back to several of the studies mentioned earlier in this chapter, which take autobiographical (Kirby, 1996) and literary narratives (McKittrick, 2000), as well as interviews or personal narratives (Radcliffe, 1999a) as sources for understanding how people experience themselves in relation to place. McKittrick’s and Radcliffe’s studies involved analyzing interviews and literature respectively. They each model ways of attending to how national belonging is negotiated in relation to race, class, gender, and geography. McKittrick’s (2000) examination of The Bluest Eye is valuable for the way it historicizes geographies and spatializes histories. In what she calls an “anti-racist geography” McKittrick analyzes literary accounts of daily life to reveal how geographies speak of interlocking racial, gender, and class hierarchies. Radcliffe (1999a) juxtaposes the ideal embodiment of the national narrative to people’s
formulations of their own identities. By connecting these narratives to people’s actual location (whether it is rural/urban, working in the home or in the military), Radcliffe discerns how notions of national belonging intersect with gender, race. The way that these factors physically “locate” people within the national landscape affects how they negotiate belonging. For instance, she finds a relation between men and women’s different degrees of insertion in the public sphere and the ways that they identify racially. Women’s lack of visibility within the public sphere leads them to distance themselves from “othered” embodiments such as being a mestiza. For men, who experience a higher degree of insertion within the public sphere, identifying with a mestizo identity is less problematic. Both Radcliffe and McKittrick attend to how national narratives are embodied in particular places, practices, and objects (e.g. the Shirley Temple doll). This is an approach that I take in this thesis, particularly in chapter three, where I analyze literary and autobiographical accounts of the conventillo vis-à-vis domestic work.

Kirby (1996) studies the journals of explorers. She specifically focuses on how the personal texts written by “mapping men” constructed their environment, and how the men’s encounters with a “foreign” environment informed their self-perceptions. She does this by attending to their textual “mapping” of the environment, their observations, their interactions with the land. As stated before, Kirby draws on, and also critiques psychoanalytic theory, showing how the subject who needs to differentiate himself from his surroundings was constituted within specific power relations. She relates this self-conception to the historical context, these men were engaged in territorial conquests. Although Kirby does not refer to Lefebvre, she could be said to be tracking the representational spaces constituted by these explorers. Representational space is again, the “space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39). The maps and textual descriptions generated by these early cartographers show an interconnection between space as lived, imagined, and represented:

The similarity of mapped space and the mapping subject stems from the way the boundary between them is patterned as a constant barricade enforcing the difference between the two sites, preventing admixture and the diffusion of either identity. Cartography institutes a particular kind of boundary between the subject and space, but is also itself a site of interface, mediating the relationship between space and the subject and constructing each in its own particularly ossified way.
Furthermore, their representations would have been relevant to how other Europeans would later experience the space, figuratively and literally. As shown by Pratt, travel writings had a profound effect on how Europeans viewed the rest of the world. Therefore Kirby provides a useful model for how personal or autobiographical writings can be used to tease out a subject’s perception of their surroundings. I draw significantly on her approach in chapter four, where I propose that the autobiographical text of Páez Vilaró constitutes a mapping of the *conventillo*.

Given these models, this thesis tracks how subjects make sense of themselves through place and how place comes to mean through particular practices and embodiments. How do people learn of their place in the nation, through their actual *placement* within it? I interpret the data – autobiographical materials, media representations, and performance – by attending to how space is constituted and constitutive. How do place, and embodiments made through place, constitute meanings, subjectivities, and group identities? Kay Anderson et al. (2003, p. 4) point out that “meaning” itself is by no means straightforward:

> Understanding how and why landscapes become embedded with individual and cultural meaning and in turn create new meanings is fraught with complications. What exactly do we mean by meaning? Does it refer to individual emotions, experiences and memories, or to group values, attachments and ideals? How do we interpret meaning from place? And whose meanings are given precedence in those interpretations? Interpretation of “ordinary” landscapes – places that we often take for granted in our everyday life, like our homes and towns – requires in-depth often intimate, knowledge of local history, cultural values and economic structures. Interpretation of symbolic landscapes – places that are imbued with special meaning beyond the everyday – requires investigations at a different scale. (Anderson et al., 2003, p. 4)

In this thesis, I track meaning by attending to all of the above categories – emotions, memories, and experiences. The *conventillo* is itself is both an “ordinary” and a “symbolic” space. It is ordinary as far as it is a living space, the space of everyday life. It is symbolic in the sense that it continues to “mean” far beyond its boundaries, and its own life. It has become a symbolic place in the Uruguayan imagination. Therefore I attend to how it is mobilized both in the intimate accounts of residents, neighbours, and visitors, as well as and in the wider national context (media, songs, plays).
These are the key questions that guided my analysis of the data:

- What are the meanings attached to the Afro-Uruguayan *conventillo*?
- How does the *conventillo* make meaning?
- How do people come to know themselves through this site?
- How are the meanings produced in and through *conventillo*/Medio Mundo related to other sites and the nation?

These same questions guide my analysis of literary text. In the next section, I turn to how literature is a valid source of data for understanding social processes.

**Literary Texts and Contrapuntal Reading**

Like Said (1993), I understand literature as enmeshed in the discursive and material practices of society. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said writes that when we examine literature, we must connect the structures of a narrative to the ideas, concepts, experiences from which it draws support. Conrad’s Africans, for example, come from a huge library of Africanism, so to speak, as well as from Conrad’s personal experiences. There is no such thing as a direct experience, or reflection, of the world in the language of a text.

(Said, 1993, p. 67)

Said is referring to the way that Joseph Conrad’s understanding of Africa was necessarily shaped by prevalent Western notions, as well as the ongoing European conquest, of this continent. “Contrapuntal reading” means attending to the historical, as well as the discursive and ideological context from which a literary work emerges:

In practical terms, “contrapuntal reading” as I have called it means reading a text with an understanding of what is involved when an author shows, for instance, that a colonial sugar plantation is seen as important to the process of maintaining a particular style of life in England.

(Said, 1993, p. 66)

Literature incorporates a society’s ways of knowing and its power structures. This does not mean that all texts produced within a certain place and time have the same politics,
but rather, that they are underwritten by the “conditions of possibility” of “what counts as ‘reasonable knowledge’” (Hook, 2005, p. 4). Said notes that whether they were written by pro- or anti-imperialists, 19th-century European novels could not help but reference the imperial context within which they were written. For instance, imperialism “permitted” Jane Austen’s use of Antigua in *Mansfield Park*. As Derek Hook (2005, p. 26) describes there are “sociopolitical and historical antecedents to literary texts.” A contrapuntal reading can provide insight into the social and power relations underpinning the text. So in chapter three, for instance, when I examine the play *Carnaval de Lubolos*, which is set in a *conventillo* courtyard, I understand it as produced within a certain historical moment, drawing on and reflecting some of the ways that the *conventillo* was lived and perceived at that time. This play, and other literary representations of the *conventillo* are not revealing the “reality” of the *conventillo* any more or less than do autobiographical narratives. Instead, I argue that these texts can be interpreted to discern the power dynamics within which they are constituted, revealing the structures of feeling and belonging that shaped the space.

I want to emphasize, then, that although much of my analysis derives from the “text,” it is always with an eye on the historical-material conditions from which it emerges. Hook points out that

> without reference to the underwriting conditions of what constitutes “reasonable knowledge,” discursive analytic procedures will only be able to make isolated comments with a generalizability and political relevance limited to the reference point of the analysed text.

(Hook, 2005, p. 9)

Thus, in order to connect the texts, interviews, and performances studied in this thesis, I have already provided an outline of the historical context that produced them and I maintain the historical optic in the chapters that follow.

I want to invoke again Said’s reading of Conrad:

> What he supplies in *Heart of Darkness* is the result of his impressions of those texts interacting creatively, together with the requirements and conventions of narrative and his own special genius and history. To say of this extraordinarily rich mix that it “reflects” Africa, or even that if reflects an experience of Africa, is somewhat pusillanimous and surely misleading. What we have in *Heart of Darkness* – a work of immense influence, having provoked many readings and images – is a politicized, ideologically saturated Africa which to some intents and
purposes was the imperialized place, with those many interests and ideas furiously at work in it, not just a photographic literary “reflection” of it.

(Said, 1993, p. 67)

Thus literature is empirical not because it reflects reality, but because it is “saturated” with ideas the ideas that shape that reality, how it is understood and made meaningful.

Alvarez et al. (1998) point to the urgency of theorizing the connections between the “textual” and “material” within Latin American citizenship studies:

The tension between the textual and that which underlies it, between representation and its grounding, between meanings and practices, between narratives and social actors, between discourse and power can never be resolved in the terrain of theory. But the “never enough” goes both ways. If there is always “something else” beyond culture, something that is not quite captured by the textual/discursive, there is also something beyond the so-called material, something that is always cultural and textual.

(Alvarez et al., 1998, p. 5)

In this thesis I have strived to keep an eye on the ways that the material/spatial, the cultural, and the textual shape each other.

Performance

By taking performance seriously as a system of learning, storing, and transmitting knowledge, performance studies allows us to expand what we understand by “knowledge.” This move, for starters, might prepare us to challenge the preponderance of writing in Western epistemologies.

(Taylor, 2003, p. 16)

My understanding of performance is greatly indebted to Diana Taylor (2003), who defines performance as a mode of knowledge production and as an analytical lens. For Taylor, performances are events that transmit knowledge and memory through means that are not strictly textual. They are acts that are embodied and are distinguishable from everyday practices. Performance involves the repetition of a familiar script or repertoire in order to be intelligible (a theme I will elaborate on in chapter five). Some examples of performance include cultural or religious rituals, political demonstrations, theatre, and different sorts of spectacles. A key feature of performance is that it “requires presence” (Taylor, p. 2003, p. 20). Performers and spectators must be present in the same time/space:

People participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by “being there,” being a part of the transmission. As opposed to the supposedly stable
objects in the archive, the actions that are the repertoire do not remain the same. The repertoire both keeps and transforms choreographies of meaning. …Dances change over time, even though generations of dancers (and even individual dancers) swear they’re always the same. But even though the embodiment changes, the meaning might very well remain the same.

(Taylor, 2003, p. 20)

Performance is thus conceptualized as embodying knowledge about a social group’s history and identity. In chapter five, I explore the repertoire and common storylines that underpin the performance of the vedette, Rosa Luna, guided by performance theory and equipped with tools from psychoanalysis.

A Final Word on Sources Consulted

In conducting research for this thesis, I read practically everything that has been published on the conventillos of Barrio Sur and Palermo. Having said that, there is very little written history on these neighbourhoods, a fact that was confirmed by several of the key informants. Alejandra Luz (2001) provides a brief history and analysis of these neighbourhoods in Los conventillos de barrio Sur y Palermo: mucho más que casas de inquilinato. Alvaro Sanjurjo (2002) has published a book of photographs of Medio Mundo, taken shortly before the building was demolished. Ernest Kroch (2004) documents his experiences in the neighbourhood as a member of the Comité Barrio Sur in Crónicas del Barrio Sur. I have found bits and pieces of its history in other texts (Benton, 1986; Conti, 1986; Tomás Olivera Chirimini & Varese, 2000; Romo, 2002; Schelotto, 2000). Barrio Sur and Palermo are also present in the scant published autobiographical and literary writings of Afro-Uruguayans including Historias de Exclusión: Afrodescendientes en el Uruguay (Porzecanski & Santos, 2006), Una mujer llamada Rosa Luna (Pierri, 1994), Sin tanga y sin tongo (Luna, 1988b), Antología de poetas negros uruguayos (volumes I and II) (Britos, 1990, 1997), and El barquero del Río Jordán : Canto a la Biblia (Gularte, 1998). These sources are described within the chapters where they are discussed and a full list of all the sources is compiled in Appendix B.

In addition, I referred to other sources, which document daily life in Montevideo during the period studied in this thesis. These books include Barrios montevideanos con

**Key Informants**

In order to fill out the historical picture of Barrio Sur and Palermo, I interviewed eleven key informants. All of the informants were contacted by an information letter that described this project (see Appendix C) and they all signed a letter of consent (see Appendix D). Without exception, all the informants agreed that they would like their real names and biographical information to be published, since they did not feel that their inclusion in this thesis would in any way prejudice them. In fact, the informants were happy to be a part of this project and to have their names included. In addition, I agreed to send the informants a summary of the thesis findings (in Spanish) upon completion. The interviews ranged from one to two hours. They were conducted in Spanish and all the translations are my own. I used a question guide, which is included in Appendix E. The interviews were conducted from June to July of 2006 in Montevideo, Uruguay. Below are the names and a brief introduction to each of the informants.

**Jorge Emilio Cardoso**

Jorge Emilio Cardoso is an Afro-Uruguayan playwright and poet, who grew up in a conventillo in Ciudad Vieja (see above). This writer has been recognized as a major Afro-Uruguayan voice and for his ability to write poetry and historical fiction (M. A. Lewis, 2003).

**Francisco Guatimí**

Francisco Guatimí (b. 1951) was born in a peripheral Montevideo neighbourhood (Las Pajas). He began to Barrio Sur and Palermo to attend the vocational college, Universidad del Trabajo del Uruguay. At that time he became involved with people in the neighbourhood, including the Teatro Negro Uruguayo, described above. Guatimí is an actor, poet, and journalist. At the time of the interview, Guatimí was employed as a refrigeration technician on a ship.
Tomás Olivera Chirimini
Tomás Olivera Chirimini (1937) is a writer, musician, historian and researcher of Afro-Uruguayan culture. He was closely associated with the conventillos in Barrio Sur and Palermo. His family has owned a house across from the location of conventillo Ansina for three generations. When I interviewed him, he was working on a film documentary of these neighbourhoods, focusing on candombe.

Jorge Goñi
Jorge Goñi was born in 1915 in Argentina, but moved to Montevideo shortly after and grew up in a nearby neighbourhood, Cordón. Goñi’s connection to the neighbourhood began in 1955 when he visited conventillo Medio Mundo as a member of Emmaus, a Christian charity organization. He would befriend the conventillo residents to try to impart Christian values.

Lagríma Ríos
Lagríma Ríos (born Lida Nelba Benavídez in 1924-2006) was an internationally renowned tango singer, who was born in the city of Durazno, but has resided in Barrio Sur since her childhood. In various interviews she has spoken of her origins and what it has meant to be a black woman in Uruguay. Ríos was also a political activist and was an honorary president of Mundo Afro, an Afro-Uruguayan cultural and political organization. I interviewed Ríos in July, 2006, just a few months before her death.

Beatriz Santos Arrascaeta
Beatriz Santos Arrascaeta (b. 1948) is an Afro-Uruguayan researcher, writer, singer, actress, activist, and researcher. As noted above, she co-edited a book on Afro-Uruguayans experiences with Teresa Porzecanski (Porzecanski & Santos, 2006). In addition, Santos has edited a book on Afro-Uruguayan contributions (Santos, 1998a). At the time I interviewed Santos, she was working within a department in the municipal government, which was dedicated to Afro-Uruguayan issues. Santos grew up in the neighbourhood Buceo, but visited a family in Palermo as a child.
Marta da Silva
Marta Silva, born in the 1940s, moved into Palermo as a teenager and lived close to the conventillo Ansina. She had many friends in the neighbourhood and enjoyed the sociable atmosphere. She was employed in domestic work for a time, while she attended the Universidad de Trabajo, from which she graduated as a tailor. Silva worked for many years as a tailor before retiring. When I interviewed her, Marta was active with Mundo Afro and Afrogama (a women’s caucus within Mundo Afro).

Néstor Silva
Néstor Silva (b. 1947) is an Afro-Uruguayan activist with Mundo Afro. He is also a singer and at the time of the interview, was working with Beatriz Santos in the municipal department on Afro-Uruguayan affairs. He grew up in Buceo and only knew the conventillos vicariously.

Waldemar “Cachila” Silva
Waldemar Silva (b. 1947) grew up in Medio Mundo as part of the legendary Silva family. His father, Angel Silva, led a well-known comparsa, Morenada. His family and the comparsa welcomed Carlos Páez Vilaró into the conventillo. His grandmother was a superintendent in the conventillo. In addition to his factory job, Silva continues to be involved in music. He now leads C1030, a comparsa that was formed to commemorate Medio Mundo (the address was Cuareim 1030). Silva still lives in Barrio Sur with his family and he is involved in running a community centre there.

Juan Antonio Varese
Juan Antonio Varese is an historian who has co-written with Olivera Chirimini on the history of Afro-Uruguayan music. He is also an art historian and legal worker.

Rita
Rita, 65 years old at the time of the interview, has lived all her life in Barrio Sur. She spent her childhood and youth in Medio Mundo until its destruction in 1978. Her family

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11 There is no relation between the Silvas that I interviewed.
was very involved in candombe. Her mother was a “Mamavieja,” an old lady character in carnival and she danced with the comparsas. Rita came to the interview with Waldemar Silva to share some of her recollections. She worked most of her life as a housekeeper.
Chapter Two

A History of the Conventillo and a History of the Urban Slum

Introduction: A Geographic History and a Historic Geography

The history of black subjects in the diaspora is a geographic story that is, at least in part, a story of material and conceptual placements and displacements, segregations and integrations, margins and centers, and migrations and settlements. These spatial binaries, while certainly not complete or fully accurate, also underscore the classificatory where of race.

(McKittrick, 2006, p. xiv)

The conventillo’s history is contextually specific, but not unique. Readers will recognize a familiar story where black people are initially enslaved, later ghettoized, and then displaced (Goldberg, 1993; Nelson, 2002, 2008; Oliveira, 1996; Vargas, 2006). Unlike the U.S. experience, racial boundaries were not legislated in Latin America. The Montevideo conventillos were multiracial spaces. Yet, as this chapter shows, there is a long history that equates the conventillos, Barrio Sur, and Palermo with blackness. This ascription is both given by the dominant society and claimed by many Afro-Uruguayans. It is also the “Afro-Uruguayanness” of these neighbourhoods that is remembered and celebrated today. Thus, accounting for the history and continuing significance of Barrio Sur and Palermo requires exposing how race defined the space and its residents, that is the social construction of race and space and the process of racialization.

This chapter provides a brief history of the conventillos of Barrio Sur and Palermo. I begin by discussing the historical roots of the conventillo and its significance for Afro-Uruguayan identity. I then turn to a study that contextualizes the demolitions in these neighbourhoods as a product of Uruguay’s authoritarian regime from 1973-1984 (Benton, 1986). Next, I review how other racialized spaces have been studied. This discussion establishes how racial or ethnic enclaves were produced as ongoing effects of colonialism (Goldberg, 1993) leading into a discussion of how the residents come to embody the “slum.” In dominant discourses, the sorry state of the slum or ghetto folds back upon the residents. The culture, practices, and morality of people of colour are denigrated and blamed for causing the slum conditions (Nelson, 2002, 2008) and violence (Silva, 2001; Vargas, 2006). Yet racialized spaces are not only reviled, they are also
sometimes celebrated and folklorized. I discuss a study of such a neighbourhood in Puerto Rico (Godreau, 2002) and then turn to a discussion of the central paradox addressed by my thesis, the paradox of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion. I end by arguing that this paradox needs to be studied with respect to the psychodynamics of space and structures of citizenship and belonging. The central message of this chapter is that spaces are produced through, and produce, meaning, making it critical to study how spaces are narrated, performed, and lived in order to understand how belonging and citizenship are structured.

A Brief History of the Conventillos of Barrio Sur and Palermo

The emergence of an Afro-Uruguayan community in Barrio Sur and Palermo is integral to the history and geography of slavery. Most of the black people who ended up living in the area traced their roots to formerly enslaved Africans and Afro-descendants. Since before Uruguay was founded as a nation in 1828, Montevideo was a major port in the trans-Atlantic slave trade (Carvalho-Neto, 1965; Montaño, 1997). Some of the city’s founding citizens benefited greatly from the commerce in human chattel (Carvalho-Neto, 1965; Montaño, 2001). Many enslaved people passed through this port before being sent to diverse points in South America. Once arrived in Montevideo, slaves were quarantined outside the walled city for forty days to avoid bringing diseases into the city proper.

The spatial organization of slavery on this territory differed somewhat from that of other regions. Plantations and mines were non-existent. The economy was largely based on cattle. Because cattle raising is not labour intensive, most of the slaves who stayed in the territory worked within the households of Montevideo families and some were taken to work on the estancias (cattle ranches) in the countryside. The women performed domestic tasks (cooking, cleaning, raising children, sewing, selling food, etc.); the men worked in the ports, trades, and as farm-hands (Carvalho-Neto, 1965). Women and men also performed all kinds of hard, menial labour, including transporting water and waste water (Montaño, 1997). The spatial relation between black slaves and white owners therefore differed from that observed in other contexts. In places such as Brazil, for instance, a majority of slaves worked in plantations. Their lodgings tended to be communal and separate from those of the slave-owners. In Montevideo, however,
because slaves were primarily engaged domestically, they lived apart from each other and within the homes of the slave-owners (Carvalho-Neto, 1965). Traditional Uruguayan historiography holds that this made for a more benign slave/master relation (Carvalho-Neto, 1965; C. M. Rama, 1967), though Oscar Montaño (2001) shows that there was nothing benevolent about Montevideo’s “domestic” slavery. Historians and anthropologists long argued that since slaves were physically separated from one another, they could not form a community and underwent a process of deculturation (Carvalho-Neto, 1965; Pereda Valdés, 1965). It is well documented, however, that enslaved Africans formed mutual aid societies in Montevideo, as they did elsewhere in Spain and Latin America (Montaño, 1997, p. 220). Incidents of marronage and a slave rebellion in 1803 also indicate the existence of alliances (Montaño, 2001).

Alliances were probably formed during weekly gatherings that were permitted. These congregations took place on Sunday afternoons and there would be religious ceremonies, socializing, drumming, and dancing (Montaño, 1997; Tomás Olivera Chirimini & Varese, 2000). The drumming style would eventually be called *candombe* (Tomás Olivera Chirimini & Varese, 2000). As in other places where diasporic Africans lived, a major annual event was the crowning of the Kings and Queens on the date of the Christian Epiphany (January 6) (Tomás Olivera Chirimini & Varese, 2000). Community elders were selected to represent the nations from which they originated, dressed in finery borrowed from the slave-owners and the congregation marched through parts of the city. Olivera Chirimini and Varese (2000) indicate that these ceremonies were crucial to maintaining a group identity and passing on traditions to the younger generations.

Responses to the gatherings and the drumming were mixed. For some white Montevideans, the drumming was a form of entertainment. The crowning of the Kings and Queens was viewed with amusement, paternalism, and/or disdain (Andrews, 2007b). The Sunday gatherings also provoked anxiety (Andrews, 2007b; Tomás Olivera Chirimini & Varese, 2000). This was evident in press articles from the early 1800s, whose authors were scandalized by the drumming and dancing (Andrews, 2007b). As a result, the gatherings and the drumming became more heavily regulated. In 1816, the Montevideo police decreed that these congregations could only take place outside of the city’s walls, on the afternoon of a recognized holiday (Tomás Olivera Chirimini &
Varese, 2000, p. 229). This location was already significant for the enslaved. Women carried heavy loads to the limits of the citadel to wash laundry in the river’s shore. Manumitted Africans and Afro-descendants also began to build shacks in this location throughout the 19th-century. Eventually, black societies built modest headquarters, *salas*, where religious and social events took place. Once slavery was fully abolished in 1852, Afro-Uruguayans spread out into the general area, which eventually became Barrio Sur.12

Barrio Sur is located on the southern shore of the city (see map, figure 2). It begins a few blocks away from where the city walls once were, and extends east to Palermo. The area now comprised by Palermo used to house army barracks. Since the army was a source of manumission and employment for black men, many Afro-Uruguayan families had settled in these two neighbourhoods by the late 19th century (Olivera Chirimini in Rodríguez, 2006, p. 66).

Barrio Sur and Palermo eventually became the site for the first planned affordable housing of Montevideo, the *conventillos* (Benton, 1986). By the late 19th-century, the city was experiencing rapid population growth due to immigration (largely from Europe) and migrants from the rural interior. This influx, in addition to the newfound “homelessness” of former slaves, created an increased demand for cheap housing (Conti, 1986). In consultation with the municipal authorities, *conventillos* were built by developers as a short term solution for the many new immigrants. Nydia Conti (1986) notes that this was a successful investment for the developers who made money off the rents of cheaply made buildings. As the immigrants became established, the plan was, they would move on to better housing and many did. Many Afro-Uruguayans, who were already living in the area, took up residence in these affordable lodgings as well. This lent *conventillos* their multi-ethnic, multi-racial, and working class character, and led to the naming of Medio Mundo, “half the world.”

*Conventillos* varied in size and layout. The typical *conventillo* was a rectangular building of one to three stories, built around a central courtyard. This type of building shares many structural, as well as social, features with the *conventillos* of Buenos Aires, the *corralas* of Madrid, the *solares* of Havana, the *vecindades* of Mexico City, and the

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12 Abolition happened gradually in Uruguay, through a series of laws that were passed between 1825-1852 (Tomás Olivera Chirimini & Varese, 2000, p. 229).
tenements of cities such as Lima and Bogotá (Angert, 2006; A. G. Gilbert & Ward, 1982; Martínez López & Ramírez Guadalix, 1998). Many rooms faced the courtyard and usually one family lived in each room. Toilet facilities, laundry sinks, and cooking areas were shared. And, as will be discussed in chapter three, some conventillos were built with many laundry sinks to support the livelihood of the women, many of whom worked as laundresses. Due to the cramped quarters, much of the conventillo’s daily life happened in the courtyard and this lent the space its communal character (Luz, 2001). The courtyard was the site of laundering, cooking, playing, and socializing (see figure 3). Most famously, this is where the comparsas (drumming groups) would rehearse. Other buildings that had a different layout were also sometimes called conventillos or casas de inquilinato (boarding houses). They were often old stately houses past their prime, which were now rented out by the room. Barrio Sur and Palermo had a mixed class composition. Single-family and middle-class homes existed alongside the conventillos and more precarious shacks. As discussed further on, the middle-class residents played a part in the destruction of the conventillos.

Conventillos were located in different parts of the city, but the ones in Barrio Sur and Palermo became identified as Afro-Uruguayan (Rodríguez, 2006). In addition to Afro-Montevideans, black rural migrants also found their way to the conventillos (Rodríguez, 2006). The conventillos of Sur and Palermo thus became a hub for the cultivation of Afro-Uruguayan community, culture, identity (Lewis, 2003; Luz, 2001; Rodríguez 2006). Several musical styles flourished in these settings, particularly those that were a mixture of African diasporic and European influences such as candombe, tango and milonga (Ferreira, 2001; Luz, 2001; Tomás Olivera Chirimimi & Varese, 2000). By the 1940s these neighbourhoods were the stomping grounds for many Afro-Uruguayan artists and musicians including Ruben Galloza, Rosa Luna, Angel Silva, and Lagríma Ríos. The neighbourhoods were also known for producing boxers and soccer players, reflecting the few avenues available for Afro-Uruguayan advancement (Pi

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13 One of the streets in the neighbourhood was renamed “Ansina” in honour of the one black person who appears in Uruguayan history books. Ansina was a former slave, who became the “loyal servant” of Uruguay’s national hero, Gervasio Artigas. Critics point out that Ansina was not just a servant, but was a military strategist in his own right, as well as a writer and thinker (Rodríguez, 2006). The naming of the street Ansina was a recognition that this was a heavily Afro-Uruguayan neighbourhood.

14 The nearby neighbourhood of Cordón also had some Afro-Uruguayan conventillos.
Hugarte, 2001). The sense of community and cultural identity nurtured by these neighbourhoods parallels processes seen in other racialized neighbourhoods (Bernasconi, 2002). For instance, Afro-Cuban culture thrived and thrives in the aforementioned solares of central Havana (Angert, 2006).

**Daily Life in the Conventillo**

Conventillo residents led complex and diverse lives, which can hardly be summarized here. Nonetheless it is important to acknowledge the common material, social, and structural conditions shared by conventillo dwellers. The residents considered themselves part of the working class, not the most destitute of society (Kroch, 2004). They were for the most part tenants, not squatters. A few Afro-Uruguayan families came to own houses in the neighbourhood. The men worked in workshops, in dockyards, as porters, in factories, in the army, etc. Many of the women were engaged in domestic work, but they worked in other occupations as well. In addition, many Afro-Uruguayan poets, artists, and musicians emerged from, or were drawn to, these neighbourhoods.

Daily life in the conventillo is remembered as being marked by cramped quarters, hard work, poverty, conviviality, solidarity, and also conflict (Kroch, 2004; Luna, 1988; Luz, 2001; Pi Hugarte, 2001; Rodríguez, 2001a). Ernesto Kroch (2004, p. 31), a German immigrant who lived in the neighbourhood and became a housing activist, recalls the stench of latrines mixed with bleach, the rotting floorboards, and the leaky roofs. His memories echo those of Jorge Emilio Cardoso (1992), an Afro-Uruguayan playwright who lived in a conventillo in a nearby part of the city (Ciudad Vieja). Yet, although Cardoso was disturbed by the lack of privacy, the quarrels over the amenities, and the

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15 As Bernasconi notes, ghettoization may lead communities to flourish in terms of their cultural identity. The Jewish ghettos of Europe, the black ghettos of the United States, and the immigrant ghettos wherever they are found, arise as the dominant group’s solution to the problem of how to contain that which it wants to exclude but is unable to do without or eradicate. The Jews were a source of finance and blacks, like the various immigrant groups, are a source of cheap labor. The ghetto is the location handed over to “the others” so that they disappear into it….Although the ghetto was for many immigrants the stepping-stone on which, or “decompression chamber” through which, they assimilated and passed into the larger society, for others it has provided a context in which they could maintain a sense of their old identity, traditions, and language. Furthermore, these ethnic minorities were not passive. They used the space of the ghetto to develop their own organizations and counterculture.

(Bernasconi, 2002, p. 346)
high incidence of illness, he felt a deep loss when his family had to move away. The Carnival vedette Rosa Luna (1988) recalls Medio Mundo – where she grew up – as a place where black community and bitter poverty coexisted. In Medio Mundo she became immersed in *candombe*. Tragically this is also where several of her siblings died during childhood.

Two of my informants, Rita and Cachila (2006, personal communication), lived in Medio Mundo. Rita, now in her sixties, was employed in domestic work and danced in the *comparsas* as a young woman. Cachila (born in 1947) had deep roots in Medio Mundo. His grandmother, Doña Gregoria, was considered a matriarch of the place. She acted as a superintendent, collected rents and generally kept the peace. His father, Angel Silva, led one of the legendary *comparsas*, Morenada. Rita and Cachila remember hard-working people and a family atmosphere. Singer Lagríma Ríos (2006, personal communication) remembers her home in a rooming house in Barrio Sur as the place where she learned the meaning of the word “solidarity.” When her family had nothing left to eat, a neighbour would always drop by with a new dish for her mother to “sample.”

Thus, despite the decrepit state of the buildings, there were some advantages to living in these neighbourhoods. By the 20th-century, Barrio Sur and Palermo were located next to the city centre. People did not have to travel far to go to jobs, schools, and shops. The area had an infrastructure and there was even a trades college located in Palermo (Universidad de Trabajo del Uruguay), which some residents were able to access. From most accounts, conventillos were far from ideal living spaces, but they provided opportunities for solidarity, identity-building, and economic survival that were lost with their destruction.

**Barrio Sur and Palermo: A place for Afro-Uruguayan identity**

*Los inmigrantes viven el conventillo, como un lugar de pasaje transitorio o definitivo que no llega a convertirse en sinónimo de espacio propio. Los negros en cambio le convierten en territorio, en su territorio.*

(The immigrants’ stay in the *conventillo* is transitory; it does not become synonymous with their own space. Black people, on the other hand, convert it into a territory, their territory.)

(Luz, 2001, p. 18)
The importance of Barrio Sur and Palermo for the formation of Afro-Uruguayan pride and identity is evinced in historical, literary, and autobiographical accounts (Luz, 2001; Olivera & Varese). The number of Afro-Uruguayan artists who refer to these neighbourhoods in songs and literature attests to their significance. Nicole Roberts (2004, p. 190) finds these connections in the poetry of Pilar Barrios (1889-1974) and José Roberto Suárez (1902-1964). Marvin Lewis (2003, p. 18) devotes one chapter of *Afro-Uruguayan literature: Postcolonial perspectives* to the theme of place. He foregrounds the role of poetry in constructing a sense of “Afro-Uruguayan symbolic space over the years” through reference to the *conventillos* of Barrio Sur and Palermo:

In sum, poets like Arrascaeta, Suárez, Gularte, and Barbosa are invaluable in the literary construction of an Afro-Uruguayan sense of place. Through their verses, the reader is privileged to witness the zenith and decline of certain cultural traditions that are being re-created daily through memory and performances by writers and artists. In this regard, poets and other exponents of popular culture share a common goal.

(M. A. Lewis, 2003, p. 26)

Thus poets and other artists were key in nurturing the sense that this was an Afro-Uruguayan space.

The neighbourhoods were significant even for those who never lived there. When I interviewed activist and writer Beatriz Santos, she recounted poignant memories of her family’s visits to a family in Ansina, a *conventillo* located in Palermo. Whereas in her neighbourhood there might have been four black families, here they were the majority. In Ansina, she found a sense of community that she had not experienced elsewhere. She remembers an elaborate banquet set out for the guests, all of which added to the specialness of the event for the young Beatriz:

*No solo se estaba festejando afuera, verdad, el día de las llamadas, si no que adentro en el entorno familiar y de amistades. Entonces era algo muy interesante, muy particular que realmente no lo viví en ningún otro lado. Lo vivía allí, especialmente en el conventillo Ansina.*

(The celebration was happening not only outside – it was the day of the *llamadas* – but also inside with friends and family. So then, this was something very interesting for me that I hadn’t seen elsewhere. I only lived it there, particularly in the *conventillo* Ansina.)

(Beatriz Santos, 2006, personal communication)
Another informant I interviewed, Francisco Guatimí, grew up in a neighbourhood that was in Montevideo’s periphery, Las Pajas. He recalls feeling a sense of awakening once he started visiting Barrio Sur and Palermo as a youth in the 1960s, when he was studying at the vocational college (UTU). Guatimí became involved in the Teatro Negro Uruguayo, a theatre company.\textsuperscript{16} Guatimí is now a refrigeration technician on ships and he continues to be involved in black theatre. Here is how Guatimí recalls the neighbourhood:

*Hay una cosa que hay que vivirla, que solo viviendola se puede contar aquello....esa flor de piel...esa necesidad de estar ahí, de convivir, de ver a esa gente.......Sabé que es la amabilidad, la sonrisa, la solidaridad, el compartir el mate, el compartir la torta frita, el tocar el tambor. Pese a todas esas angustias, las miserias y todo lo que hubiera ahí pero siempre.....hay una cosa que es...que son... expresiones de amor. La gente vivía con mucho amor. Yo en el barrio aprendí realmente a darle mas atención a la palabra amor. La amistad es una ...Te diría que en algunos casos yo llegué casi, casi, sustituir parte de mi familia ahí. Casi, casi, yo adopté ....Tenía varias madres por ahí en el barrio. Impresionante, no.*

(This is something that you had to experience, only by living it can you tell about it… like the velvety petal of a flower …that need to be there, to coexist, to see those people…You know that kindness, that smile, that solidarity…to share a *mate*\textsuperscript{17}, to share a *torta frita*\textsuperscript{18} to play the drums. Despite all the anguishes, all the miseries, and everything else there was….there was always something there that is…that were expressions of love. The people lived with a lot of love. In the neighbourhood I really learned to pay more attention to the word “love.” The friendship was…I would tell you that in some cases I almost, almost, came to substitute part of my family there. I almost, almost adopted….I had several mothers there in the neighbourhood. It was tremendous.)

(Francisco Guatimí, 2006, personal communication)

Both Guatimí and Santos recall intense feelings of community and belonging that were evoked in these neighbourhoods. I cannot overlook the fact that Santos’ and Guatimí’s memories of these neighbourhoods are tinged by the nostalgia for one’s youth and by their political investments in grounding their black identities. Both later became activists. Yet, this is precisely the point that I want to make here. Barrio Sur and Palermo provided places where Afro-Uruguayans could form a sense of themselves as black and Uruguayan, a geography of belonging.

\textsuperscript{16} The Teatro Negro Uruguayo was a black theatre company founded by a white lawyer, Francisco Merino. It will be discussed in more detail in chapters two and three.

\textsuperscript{17} *Mate* is a South American tea.

\textsuperscript{18} *Torta frita* is a home-made, deep-fried bread.
Given the area’s status as Afro-Uruguayan, it is important to note that it was a multi-racial space, even by essentialist standards connecting race to phenotype or origins. In the conventillo the boundaries that demarcated difference were continually blurred through cohabitation, proximity, intermarriage, friendships, kinship, cultural practices, etc. (Kroch, 2004; Luz, 2001). Tomás Olivera Chirimini, an Afro-Uruguayan musician, musical researcher, and long-time resident of Palermo, offers this perspective:

_Debemos destacar que en el conventillo y en esas casas de inquilinato, si bien en las primeras décadas del siglo actual prevalecieron los negros, antes de terminar la segunda década convivían armónicamente, negros y blancos. Allí no había diferencias raciales; mucho menos, sociales. Los blancos aprendían a tocar el tamboril, incluso algunos mejor que muchos negros, asimilaban todas las costumbres del medio, o tal punto que no podría distinguirse un negro de un blanco si no fuese por el color de su piel y sus rasgos físicos._

(We must stress that in the conventillo and in the rental houses it is true that black people predominated in the first decades of the [20th] century, but before the end of the second decade, blacks and whites were co-habiting harmoniously. There were no racial differences there; much less social ones. The whites learned to drum, some of them even better than many blacks. They assimilated many of the habits of the place, to such an extent that you would not have been able to distinguish a black from a white, were it not for his colour of skin and physical characteristics.)

(Olivera in Rodríguez, 2006, p. 67)

Olivera may or may not be overstating the fact of “harmonious” co-habitation. Yet, it is apparent that many people did engage in cross-racial, cross-ethnic, and cross-class interactions. This was a fact of life in the conventillo. In various contexts, theorists have described these dynamics of “mixing” as transculturation (Ortiz, 1995), _mestizaje_ (Martinez-Echazabal, 1998; Wade, 1997, 2005), or hybridity (García Canclini, 1995). It is outside the scope of this thesis to elaborate on the process of cultural exchange itself. Here I concur with Hanchard (2006, pp. 209-210), who points out that this is by now a mute point. It is fact that people from various social and geographic backgrounds mix, marry, and adopt each others’ cultural practices when living in close proximity.  

The literature on _mestizaje_, transculturation and hybridity shows that these interactions in

19 Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1992) go further by contesting the idea that culturally or geographically discrete societies ever existed. They hold that even in what have appeared to be the most secluded communities, there have always been interactions with Others.
themselves do not dissolve racial/class boundaries. It really depends on how they are taken up. What is pertinent to this study are the ways that the conventillo becomes a way of reinstating the racial and class boundaries that the interactions within the space may have eroded. As I have stated, my ongoing concern is to understand how the meanings produced through the conventillo are implicated in power relations.

Barrio Sur and Palermo also became a significant part of the nation’s identity, given that throughout the 20th-century candombe was increasingly taken up as a national music (Luz, 2001; Olivera Chirimini & Varese 2000). Artists who were associated with candombe, carnival, and the conventillo – such as Morenada, Rosa Luna, and Martha Gularte – became household names. In addition, the artist Carlos Páez Vilaró came to prominence through his paintings of this part of the city and was key in drawing national and international attention to the neighbourhood. Ultimately, however, the connection between the conventillos and blackness justified their destruction. During Uruguay’s military dictatorship, the state passed laws which facilitated evictions. As discussed in the next section, this legislation favoured real estate interests and mobilized pre-existing prejudices against the residents.

Following the evictions the tenants were not offered adequate housing or any other compensation (Rodríguez, 2004). Instead, they were dispersed throughout the city. Many ended up in more marginal neighbourhoods such as Cerro Norte – a neighbourhood that is located in the outskirts of Montevideo and lacks many basic services. Victims of the evictions, from Barrio Sur, Palermo, and Ciudad Vieja, also ended up forming communities in El Cerro, an established working-class neighbourhood. As squatters, they were often perceived as needy “newcomers” at best and “social scum” at worst (Canel, 2009). They were not seen to fit into the social and political culture of the area, which had repercussions for El Cerro’s local council to function in the city’s move towards decentralized government, which began in 1990 (Canel, 2001, 2009). Those who could not find other housing were relocated to even more marginal lodgings in an abandoned factory (Martínez Reina), that has been characterized as a “concentration camp” (Rodríguez, 2006, p. 159).

In the years following the evictions, the political climate in Uruguay changed. When the nation transitioned to democracy, following elections in 1984, there was no
immediate move from the government to address the injustices caused by the evictions. The visibility of Afro-Uruguayans’ concerns grew, however, due to activism against South African apartheid and the formation of several new political groups including Amandla and Organizaciones Mundo Afro (Rodríguez, 2006). Mundo Afro was formed in 1988 by Romero Rodríguez, Beatriz Ramírez and others to heighten awareness about racism within Uruguayan society. The activism of these organizations opened up some political spaces and put racism on the local and national agenda. Dialogue with the municipal government increased following the 1990 election of a left-of-centre municipal government (led by mayor Tabaré Vázquez of the Frente Amplio). In 1994, following a long period of negotiations with the municipality, Mundo Afro was granted use of an old building in the Old City, an action which led to an expansion of the organization’s activities (Organizaciones Mundo Afro, 2008). In 1998, Mundo Afro approached a Uruguayan NGO (Ciudad y Región) to provide technical assistance for a proposal to build a cooperative for Afro-Uruguayan families in Barrio Sur. In 2003, the project gained support from the Ministry of Housing, the State Environmental Agency, and the city. The 32 unit building would refurbish an abandoned building and would include recreational areas. Families headed by single mothers would be given priority. The area had undergone gentrification and the plans were opposed by some local residents, who feared that this project would lead to unsupervised children running the streets, unemployed women, and delinquency (Rodríguez, 2006, p. 184; World Habitat Awards, 2006). These residents formed a group and started a petition, which garnered hundreds of signatures. The project did go ahead, although construction has been much slower than expected. Another cooperative, which would privilege evicted families, is planned for Palermo (Lima, 2006).

Today, some Afro-Uruguayan families remain in Barrio Sur and Palermo, but their numbers have been greatly reduced. These include the Silvas, originally from Medio Mundo, and Tomás Olivera Chirimini, whose family has owned a house across from the now-defunct conventillo Ansina, since the early 1900s. The sites of the two largest

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20 Information regarding Mundo Afro and Amandla comes from Rodríguez (Rodríguez, 2006) and the Mundo Afro website [http://www.mundoafro.org/historia.html](http://www.mundoafro.org/historia.html).

21 I have not been able to confirm whether the coop has been completed.
The Eviction of Blackness from Barrio Sur and Palermo

Lauren Benton (1986) is one of the few researchers to investigate the demolitions of Sur and Palermo. For Benton, the causes were economic interests backed by authoritarian politics. The demolitions and gentrification went hand in hand with the neoliberal policies consolidated during the nation’s right-wing dictatorship (1973-1984). At this time, the state “attempted to redefine a social and political problem as a technical one” (Benton, 1986, p. 44). The problem was that landlords wanted to evict pre-1974 tenants who were still protected by rent control. Real estate prices were going up, so land speculation allowed landowners to afford the price of demolition. They were encouraged by bankers who stood to benefit from new construction because it enhanced the city core and could be used to promote Montevideo as a banking centre. To overcome former rent control measures, the city passed a law in 1978 that allowed landlords to evict tenants from buildings that were in “state of emergency” (Benton, 1986, p. 45). The most affected neighbourhoods were Barrio Sur, Palermo, and nearby Ciudad Vieja, all working class neighbourhoods that were centrally located.

The demolitions were also justified through pre-existing associations of the conventillo with filth and moral degradation (Benton, 1986). The technical aspects surrounding the evictions were connected to a racializing discourse. The government, the media, and middle-class residents argued that the buildings had deteriorated in part due to the occupants’ neglect and also their “loudness.” They implied that the conventillo residents accelerated the decline of the buildings by engaging in deviant cultural practices such as drumming. Benton also establishes that although the residents may have been

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22 Carlos Romo (2002) takes up the urban renewal process where Benton leaves off. He explores the financing of housing renovations by the city in the 1980s and 1990s. He finds that although intended to improve the housing conditions of working class people, the measures were best accessed by upper working class and middle class families. Those at the bottom end of the working class, such as former conventillo residents were not really able to profit from this social policy.

23 This phrase eerily echoes the nation’s own “state of emergency” at the time, which justified imprisonment, torture, and “disappearances.”

24 Ciudad Vieja, however, was characterized by buildings that were older, more dilapidated, and inhabited by squatters, rather than tenants.
viewed as marginal by outsiders, this is not how they viewed themselves. *Conventillo* residents were, and identified as, tenants. They expected to be protected and they responded to the evictions with resistance. In other parts of the city, such as Ciudad Vieja, evicted squatters resisted by moving from one squalid building to another. In contrast, “long residence in the neighbourhood, participation in *candombe*, and the close associations fostered by the crowded conditions of the tenements made these residents more hostile to the city’s plans and more skeptical of its motives” (Benton, 1986, p. 46). Thus residents of Barrio Sur and Palermo fought to keep homes that were close to the city’s core, the waterfront, their workplaces, and community networks.

Benton observes that race and class shape notions of space and people. She perceptively notes that the *conventillos’* national reputation as the “repositories of folk culture” positioned the residents “ambiguously” (Benton, 1986, p. 40). This romanticized notion of poverty and blackness was mobilized against the residents. The “radical Otherness” embodied by “black communities” comes into view (Nelson, 2001, p. 18). Benton’s focus, however, is on the actions of the authoritarian regime. This is an important contribution, since the national discourse and even leftist political circles were slow to recognize that Afro-Uruguayans as a group were targeted by the dictatorship (Rodríguez, 2001). Romero Rodríguez comments on this in an interview with Sonnia Romero Gorski:

> Una vez salidos de la dictadura hubo ahí todo un movimiento de aquellos que en alguna forma resistimos contra la dictadura para decirlo de alguna forma y nos parecía muy injusto que no aparecieran lecturas sociales, por parte de lo que nosotros denominamos organizaciones blancas, que no saliese la totalidad de la resistencia. Y nos parecía que era una ausencia en cuanto a la lectura de la resistencia que generaron los barrios tradicionales negros, Palermo y Barrio Sur, dos sectores de la ciudad donde la dictadura puso su bota: fuimos expulsadas más de 1,200 personas y dos barrios destruidos.

(Once the dictatorship had passed, there was a movement to make visible all of those who had in some way taken part in the resistance against the dictatorship. We felt it was unjust that there was no social interpretation, from what we would call the white organizations, of the totality of resistance. We felt there was an absence, in terms of a failure to recognize the resistance mounted by the traditionally black neighbourhoods, Palermo and Barrio Sur, two sectors of the city that were stomped by the dictatorship’s boot: Two neighbourhoods were destroyed and over 1,200 people were evicted.)
There is a danger, however, in stopping the analysis here. It is true that authoritarian regimes tend to “facilitate” these types of evictions (Audefroy, 1994; Oliveira, 1996). The danger lies in portraying the evictions as a tragedy that can be blamed on a discrete regime that is now past. The expulsion of a racialized community can then be taken up as “metonymic with the Uruguayan nation tyrannized by the military demolition” (Espinosa, 1994). The whole nation is victimized, eliding the racialized aspects of the evictions and limiting the implication of the “people” in racialization. The tendency to blame solely the dictatorship is evident in several writings (Espinosa, 1994; Trigo, 1993) and in some commemorations of Medio Mundo.\textsuperscript{25} The argument that “for a time we were all evicted blacks” ignores the politics of race (Espinosa, 1994). This analysis fails to contextualize the evictions from Barrio Sur and Palermo within the “placements and displacements” imposed upon Afro-Uruguayans from colonialism to the present. As documented by Kroch (2004), these neighbourhoods had suffered evictions long before 1973. This analysis is insufficient to account for the ongoing fascination with the conventillos after their disappearance. Lastly, this analysis fails to account for how subjects may come know themselves and be known through the conventillo’s blackness. Benton begins to scratch at the surface of the racialization of the conventillos, but more research is needed to understand how the conventillo was constituted through, and constituted, social relations and subjectivities.

Next, I contextualize the history of the conventillo by reviewing the history of the racialized slum, and studies of other impoverished and racialized urban enclaves. These sites carry different names – the slum, the ghetto, the favela. I focus on these spaces because they are linked to the conventillo by similar constellations of power and history.

\textbf{The Production and Demolition of the Slum}

Studies of the postcolonial city have shown that racially marked enclaves are produced through power relations that are connected to a colonial legacy and nation-building processes (AlSayyad, 1992; K. J. Anderson, 1991; Goldberg, 1993; Jacobs, 1996; Wilson, 2007). David Goldberg (1993) argues that racial quarters and/or slums did

\textsuperscript{25} I have also noticed this tendency when I have presented papers on my thesis at conferences.
not just “pop up,” but were the result of state strategies. Following colonial rule, modern states moved from containing to “spatially managing” racialized people, whose presence threatened ideas about racial/class distinctions (Goldberg, 1993). Not all postcolonial states behaved identically, but there was a general concern to restrict populations that had once been enslaved or otherwise contained.26 This concern, as I discuss further on, was implicated in the definition of race and class identities. Goldberg reveals a common pattern in the management of the racial ghetto: Racialized people are confined to marginal and insalubrious parts of the city. These areas and the residents are then tainted by the space and racializing discourses. Such racialized ghettos are often demonized and in many cases – as the location becomes desirable or too close for bourgeois comfort – the dwellings are deemed unsuitable for occupation. This pattern is mirrored in the history of Barrio Sur and Palermo, as discussed earlier, and in the histories of other racialized communities (Nelson, 2002, 2008; Oliveira, 1996; Vargas, 2006; Wilson, 2007).

Slum clearance is a “spatial management” strategy seen in many contexts. Administrations may justify the clearance of “slums” through health, legal, and pragmatic discourses (Audefroy, 1994; Benton, 1986; Goldberg, 1993; Nelson, 2002; Oliveira, 1996; Wilson, 2007). The slum is unhygienic; the favelas lack basic amenities; the conventillos break municipal codes. Governments enacting the expulsions often express concern for the “public good” and even the welfare of the evicted residents (Audefroy, 1994; Benton, 1986; Nelson, 2002; Oliveira, 1996). Yet history shows that mass evictions result in worse conditions for the expelled community (Audefroy, 1994; Benton, 1986; Nelson, 2002).

Insidiously, slum residents – who end up there due to race and class oppressions – are often blamed for their poor living environment. As was the case in Montevideo, rationalizations for disciplining the ghetto may be bolstered by upper and middle-class abhorrence for impoverished areas. Public authorities, experts, and the “public” blame living conditions on the ghetto residents’ lack of education, hygiene, values, and morality (Benton, 1986; Guy, 2000; Nelson, 2002). Within social science these ideas are captured

26 Of course, as several scholars have noted, these distinctions could never be absolutely realized in colonial times either and thus required constant maintenance (Martinez-Alier, 1989; Stoler, 1995).
by the theory of “culture of poverty” (O. Lewis, 1959). The problem of the slum becomes the residents themselves; it is their values that reproduce their conditions. As will be shown below, however, racialized spaces are simultaneously criminalized and rendered folkloric, disparaged and celebrated.

**Embodying the Slum: Africville and the Favelas**

I now turn to studies of several racialized neighbourhoods to illuminate how race is mobilized to make meaning of space. In addition, I refer to a study, which shows the ways that racialized people also mobilize race (Streicker, 1995). Jennifer Nelson (2001, 2008) critically analyzes the destruction of an African-Canadian community, Africville, in Nova Scotia in the 1960s. Africville’s residents, whose historical presence was a result of the slave trade, had long called for basic amenities in their neighbourhood. City officials ignored their demands and exacerbated the situation by permitting a garbage dump and other noxious industries to be located in the neighbourhood. The city then argued that tearing down Africville was the only solution, “obscuring its own creation of these conditions” (Nelson, 2001, p. 14). For Nelson, it is critical to show how racializing discourses constituted the neighbourhood as not only uninhabitable, but uncivilized. Although city officials, experts, and the public seldom invoked race, they implicitly pathologized blackness:

> For the black community to be understood as outside the bounds of normative society, it is necessary to see the culture of residents as deviant, criminal; in order to make sense of this deviance, it is necessary to see blackness as savage, uncivilized. To uphold notions of incivility, one must call up, and denigrate, black culture, values, ways of life; these in turn can be linked to the filth, the slums where people live. Their continued existence in such spaces must be explained, and this is accomplished through the attribution of irrationality, inferior intelligence, and dependence. As they are unable, or unwilling, to see their own way out of their situations, they must be policed, regulated, or rescued. If they cannot be rescued and managed, it is further evidence of their inherent deviance, their natural “apartness” on the margins. And so on. The discourses, then, are interwoven strands of an effective “common sense” logic.

(Nelson, 2008, p. 55)

The Africville residents came to embody the debasement of the slum. “Race becomes place” and bodies become constituted through the spaces they inhabit (Razack, 2002).
Studies of media representations of Brazilian *favelas* point to how a negative construction of blackness disparages the residents. *Favelas* are “shanty-towns,” built on the hills and outskirts of many Brazilian cities, most famously São Paolo and Rio de Janeiro. The first *favelas* were built by rural migrants in the 19th-century, many of them former slaves (Oliveira, 1996). Since then, old *favelas* have been razed, new ones have been built, and some have even become gentrified. The most precarious of these neighbourhoods, however, continue to house the struggling working class, a majority of whom are people of colour. Significantly, the *favelas* are places that connote criminality and violence for “mainstream” society.

João H. Costa Vargas (2006) analyzes the media coverage of an incident in a Rio *favela*, Jacarezinho, that shows how race and place are intertwined. In an attempt to curb police violence, the residents’ association of Jacarezinho implemented the anti-crime tactics used by wealthier condominiums. They put up gates and video cameras to monitor who was entering the *favela*. The mainstream media depicted this event as showing the residents’ complicity with criminal gangs. They claimed that the security system was designed to protect drug dealers. The *favelados* (*favela* residents) were criminalized and the acts of police brutality were ignored, despite ample evidence. The association’s president received little air-time compared to his “expert” detractors. For Vargas (2006, p. 60), this event demonstrated the intimate connection between race and space in Brazil; “although the space of the favela is not inherently dominating, it is certainly part of the way domination is conceptualized, exercised, and contested.” Moreover, the media representations connoted, but did not directly name, race:

> News reports do not occur in a vacuum and, indeed, express hegemonic commonsense ideas about blacks….Utilizing a public idiom to talk about racialized groups, they give voice to and support structural discrimination against Afro Brazilians resulting from policy and everyday behavior. Interestingly, the news stories about the political conflicts in Jacarezinho that appeared in Rio and São Paulo rarely if ever mentioned race, but stereotypes about blacks were implicit in them. When poor neighborhoods, crime, drugs, and violence were mentioned, a tacit connection was made with black people.  

(Vargas, 2006, pp. 50-51)

Vargas insists that the racial dimension of Brazil’s urban geography needs attention, in order to understand one of the primary ways that social exclusion functions:
The geographic exclusion so well expressed in the maintenance, demonization, and dehumanization of favelas works both as a metaphor for and as an inescapable concrete embodiment of a multitude of other marginalizations to which people of African descent are subjected in Brazil—marginalization in the areas of residence, work, health, education, and politics. It is only by confronting the multifaceted nature of antiblack racism that we will be able to understand and work toward the elimination of the glaring racialized inequalities that characterize Brazilian social relations.

(Vargas, 2006, p. 52)

Vargas’ observations are relevant for thinking about the conventillo, given that race is rarely mentioned in the social analysis of Uruguay.

Silva (2001) further explores how the geography of race and class oppression is naturalized through particular discursive moves, which criminalize black people and occlude the power relations that organize the favela. For Silva, these moves depend on a hegemonic, Western construction of blackness. She argues that in modern, post-Enlightenment thought, blackness embodies and constitutes the limits of universal humanity. This positions black spaces and black people precariously. Silva develops her argument by analyzing the local media’s coverage of several incidents of police brutality against residents of Rio’s favelas in 1993. She finds that the reports primarily define the favelados as poor, rather than black or mestiço. Again, race is not made explicit. In analyzing the media’s discourse, however, Silva reveals that these neighbourhoods and the residents are constituted through a negative blackness. For Silva,

blackness and whiteness indicate distinct kinds of modern subjects, how the white body and the social (geographic, economic and symbolic) spaces associated with

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27 The broader scope of the article is Silva’s critique of legal Critical Race Theory which views racist actions, including police violence, as counter to the principles of liberal universalism. For Silva, the task is to expose how – due to the constitution of racialized bodies and places as outside of the domain of legality and universality – this violence is built into the law. Silva

Locate[s] the conditions of possibility of these forms of race injustice in the socio-logical construction of blackness to signify a domain outside the terrain of the legal, while retaining the construction of whiteness as the signifier of the form of consciousness to which the principles underlying the normative schema of Universal Justice are indigenous. The most crucial effect of this socio-logical construction has been to produce blackness, and the place of residence of black people, as natural (pre-conceptual and pre-historical) signs of social pathology.

(Silva, 2001, p. 426)

Silva believes that understanding how blackness embodies social pathology is crucial if one is to avoid what she calls “socio-logical” explanations, which focus on the cumulative effects of social and historical exclusions, particularly in a context such as Brazil, where “the operation of race difference as a mechanism of exclusion” is not clearly visible (Silva, 2001, p. 427).
whiteness have been produced to signify the principles of universal equality and freedom informing our conceptions of the Just, the Legal, and the Good.

(Silva, 2001, p. 423)

In the media discourse, the victims of police violence are located outside the boundary of legality because of where they live. The unspoken blackness of the favelas signifies the limits of legality and humanity. Living outside legality then justifies the police brutality that befalls the residents. They are guilty by location:

With this strategy, the paper wrote the community as just another favela, the sort of place where violência is indigenous and not a novelty brought about by police vengeance. Slowly, the paper was explaining for Enlightened Cariocas why working residents could very well be the victims of police terror: they lived in the domain of the illegal.28

(Silva, 2001, p. 445)

The favelados are living in the domain of the illegal and therefore can expect violence as an ordinary part of life. In Silva’s analysis, blackness symbolizes and embodies the limits of the universality of the (Brazilian) nation. Things can happen in these neighbourhoods that don’t happen elsewhere, because the inhabitants are beyond the edge of belonging.

Nelson, Silva, and Vargas draw attention to the importance of studying the representation of racialized space alongside its materiality. In other words, it is not enough to document what happens in the favela. It is also necessary to understand what these events are taken to mean, and how people are embodied through their association with space. These three studies foreground that being embodied through black space results in a status of lesser rights. Studies that had previously focused on the favela’s multi-racial make-up failed to note that who is imagined to live there is as important as how people self-identify (see for instance Oliveira, 1996, who argues that class identities are more important than racial ones in the favelas). To quote Vargas (2006, p. 60), “it is entirely to be expected that the concept and experience of favela will have historical, social, political, and racial meanings that vary according to who is appropriating them,” but what is relevant when studying the mechanisms of violence and exclusion is to attend to how “patterns of urban occupation [are] inextricably tied to race [and] also conceptualizations of race derive from the way urban space is understood” (Vargas,

28 Cariocas are residents of Rio de Janeiro.
2006, p. 53). In Rio de Janeiro, as in Halifax, New York and other cities, police brutality, municipal negligence, and evictions are justified by a blackness that need not be named.

Joel Streicker (1995) shows that neighbourhoods are not just racialized from above. He considers the racial dynamics within the neighbourhood of Santa Ana in Cartagena, Colombia. This study centres the marginalizing tactics employed by the residents, who would be considered black by outsiders, but who do not identify themselves that way. Streicker makes the important observation that although the residents seldom use the language of race, blackness (as a negative category) is expressed through notions of class and gender. In particular, women who are seen to deviate from gender norms are considered to lack class and are therefore “blackened.” Streicker, however, does not deeply consider how these local hierarchies interact within the national one or how Santa Ana figures within the larger national picture.

The Folklorization of Black Space in Ponce, Puerto Rico

Black spaces or neighbourhoods, including the favela and the conventillo, are not always demonized. In some cases they are represented as folkloric, picturesque, and even become tourist attractions (Adams, 2007; Godreau, 2002; Jaguaribe, 2004; Williams, 2008). Isar Godreau (2002), however, shows that folkloric representations of place maintain blackness at the margins of the nation. Godreau (2002) examines how the state mobilized blackness in the revitalization of a neighbourhood regarded as black – San Antón, located in the city of Ponce, Puerto Rico. There, the government tore down and rebuilt housing to reflect what they considered traditional features of the neighbourhood. The government’s efforts to maintain a “black” aesthetic, however, were resisted by San Antón’s residents. They did not identify the neighbourhood as black – something that Godreau relates back to the denial of blackness within Puerto Rican society and to the residents’ resistance to further racial marginalization. While outsiders viewed the neighbourhood’s architectural features nostalgically, the residents had no desire to replicate them. They wanted the new housing to include modern comforts, not
“traditional” wooden construction and shared patios that had been born of necessity rather than choice.  

Godreau names this process folklorization because of the way that black people, their practices and culture are objectified, decontextualized, and essentialized. Following Jesús Martín Barbero (1987) and Néstor García-Canclini (1995), Godreau indicates that being considered part of a “folkloric” community or culture within the nation, distances those who are part of the community from proper belonging. He argues that folklorization produces a “discursive distance” between the nation and blackness:

> By discursive distance, I refer to state representations that bind blackness geographically and temporally, locating its phenotypic and cultural signs “somewhere else” and in pre-modern times. By discursive nostalgia, I refer to ideological frameworks that overlook issues of power, idealizing black people as happy and rhythmic tradition bearers who still inhabit supposedly homogeneous and harmonious communities.

(Godreau, 2002, p. 283)

Godreau argues that despite the city’s good intentions, its actions were underpinned by a desire to contain blackness.

> People often refer to San Antón as “the place where black people live.” This characterization indirectly constructs Ponce and Puerto Rico as not black. People in San Antón are thus celebrated as traditional, but simultaneously excluded from the nation for not being mixed enough.

(Godreau, 2002, p. 293)

Thus, the folklorization of San Antón is a strategy of spatial containment that constitutes whiteness. Furthermore, as Godreau indicates, it is not just race and class, but also the national identity that is at stake in defining the neighbourhood. In Puerto Rico, the national narrative has long denied the nation’s blackness. The nation is projected as a racial mixture of Europeans, indigenous Taíno, and Africans, but in a way that privileges whiteness. Despite the fact that up to 10 % of the population identifies as black, the “core” of Puerto Rican identity is related back to “the Spanish language, Catholicism, and Hispanic cultural traditions” and blackness is stigmatized (Godreau, Reyes Cruz, Franco

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29 This situation recalls Stallybrass and White’s (1986, p. 37) observation that nostalgia for folk traditions is more prevalent among the elite, than among the so-called folk.
Ortiz, & Cuadrado, 2008, p. 118). Thus local/national elites, and others who want to distance themselves and the nation from blackness, are invested in these spaces. They are invested in what goes on there and how black spaces are represented. Godreau’s findings lead back to the idea, developed in the previous chapter, that the demarcation of geographic boundaries is implicated in the maintenance of social ones.

Erica Angert’s (2006) thesis on a solar in Havana, Cuba shows how the folklorization of place is sometimes promoted by both the state and by residents. Solar is a general term used to describe a type of multi-tenant building, that exists in the neighbourhood of Centro Habana. It resembles the conventillo in both its structure and its public perception. The solar may be a modified old mansion with rooms rented out individually (cuartería), a tenement with a central courtyard (ciudadela), or a smaller house that is rented out by the room (casa de vecindad). Angert notes that – within the context of a socialist government – there is still a stigma attached to being a resident of such a racialized community. Angert emphasizes this point through her examination of a (now dated) film from director Sara Goméz, De Cierta Manera (1974). In the film, Goméz makes ironic use of documentary-style voiceovers to portray the official view of tenement and slum dwellers. The voiceover portrays the tenants as socially deviant, culturally backward people, who need to be re-educated in order to fit the vision of the revolution’s “New Man.”

Thus, much like the conventillo, the solares have an ambiguous reputation. On the one hand, they have been associated with stereotypes of architectural improvisation, physical chaos, and urban anarchy while the behavior of its tenants has been linked to equally stereotypical traits like mental disorders, domestic violence, and sexual promiscuity (Chailloux 1945). At the same time, solares have enjoyed a solid reputation as cradles of cultural creativity and reservoirs of sociopolitical energy.

(Angert, 2006, pp. 8-9)

Through her ethnographic study of one particular solar, Angert notes how Afro-Cuban “traditional” culture is mobilized both by the state and by the residents. In recent years, the Cuban state has made explicit attempts to “revive” Afro-Cuban culture, particularly

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30 This figure comes from the US Census Bureau website: [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/QTTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=04000US72&-qr_name=DEC_2000_SF1_U_DP1&-ds_name=DEC_2000_SF1_U](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/QTTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=04000US72&-qr_name=DEC_2000_SF1_U_DP1&-ds_name=DEC_2000_SF1_U), accessed June 8, 2009.

31 The “new man” refers to Ernesto “Che” Guevara’s manifesto on the ideal characteristics of the revolutionary subject. This text was first published in Montevideo in 1965.
within the context of Centro Habana and the *solares* in order to enhance tourism (Angert, 2006). Angert shows that Afro-Cuban residents take advantage of these opportunities. For instance, a feast staged for a state-sponsored television documentary becomes an homage to a deceased musician whose family still resides in the *solar*. Angert shows how the family and surrounding community benefit materially, socially, and spiritually from the experience. Angert concludes that, this staging of culture results in a scenario where “everyone wins in the end” because the goals of the different parties do not contradict each other (308-309). Angert does not, however, address how these localized practices impact upon the process of national belonging.

### Theorizing the Folklorization of Blackness: Fetishization, Pleasure and Belonging

The studies of racialized spaces discussed in this chapter foreground that the demarcation of geographic boundaries is implicated in the maintenance of social ones (Goldberg, 1993; Stallybrass & White, 1986). As Goldberg (1993) argues, racialization is not simply a matter of cordoning off marginalized groups. It also concerns the knowledge produced about racialized space and its people, because this connects to how subjects gain a sense of themselves, their nation, and their place within it. This becomes very clear in Godreau’s study. In Ponce, defining one particular neighbourhood as folklorically black, whitens the rest of the city. In the neighbourhoods studied by Nelson, Vargas, and Silva, racial/geographic boundaries were constituted by pathologizing blackness. I do not mean to suggest that foklorization and criminalization are mutually exclusive, but that different processes of marginalization may be salient at a certain place and time.

What remains to be theorized is how racialized spaces and people are not only excluded, but may also mediate national belonging. Here I am referring to the ways that aspects of blackness become incorporated into the national identity, not as an

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32 Although the razings of such neighbourhoods have not been as widespread in Havana as in other Latin American cities – Angert attributes this to the cost of demolition and rebuilding – there have been some displacements and relocations since the Cuban Revolution. In these cases, Angert notes, tenants participated in the process by both building the new homes and destroying the old ones. Angert notes that these were seen by the socialist state as opportunities to re-educate slum dwellers towards more the “New Man” ideal.
oppositional category, but as constitutive of the nation. For instance, Beatriz Jaguaribe (2004) points to the complex place occupied by the favela within the Brazilian imagination:

Cast as both the locus of the “national imagined community” and as a “fearful stain” on the landscape of modernity, the favelas were often metaphorized as an emblem of Brazil’s uneven modernization. Celebratory versions of the favela as a samba community composing carnival lyrics coexist with images of armed adolescents shooting police forces during drug raids. Since the 1980s the increase in social violence produced by the globalized drug trade and the flow of media images, consumer goods, and new cultural identities produced a crisis of representation of the “national imagined community.”

(Jaguaribe, 2004b, p. 327)

Despite their association with criminality and danger, favelas are also identified with aspects of “Brazilianness” that are definitive of the nation, such as carnival and samba, a parallel to the Montevidean conventillo. Jaguaribe’s study focuses on contemporary representations in film and literature which, she argues, rely on the “shock of the real.” She contends that the favela’s contradictory significations indicate the city’s and the nation’s ambivalent relationship to modernity, which is both “frustrated and partially fulfilled” Jaguaribe (2004, p. 327). The favela is a metaphor for the fragmentation of the city, the multiple and contradictory identities and experiences produced therein - the jarring contrasts between wealth and poverty, pleasure and violence, and the complex relation between spaces. The “favela as metaphor” perspective, however, does not account for how space is lived or how a particular site mediates belonging. Jaguaribe’s conclusion reinstates the favela as a romanticized (perhaps folkloric) site of knowledge production (or through which knowledge can be produced).

The favelas – as seen through the lens of the “shock of the real” – are sites of contention in the cities of a nation that is now openly discussing the narratives and images that express its reality in the making. Yet, within its complex structure and given its extensive exchange with the city, the favela speaks of a cultural hybridity that bypasses polarities and provides the cities without maps of the twenty-first century.

(Jaguaribe, 2004, p. 339)

Here, I concur with the previously cited favela studies (Silva, 2001; Vargas, 2006), which indicate the city is not yet bypassing polarities or lacking a racialized map.

The powerful significations associated with the slum/ghetto indicate that it occupies more than a physical space; it takes up significant symbolic space as well. To
think about the paradox posed by such sites, it is helpful to turn to the work of Peter Stallybrass and Allon White (1986). In *The politics and poetics of transgression*, they argue that the 19th-century European slum was key to shaping ideas of class, based on the dichotomy between respectability and degeneracy. They build on Michel Foucault’s (1980a) contention that the emerging bourgeoisie defined itself in contrast to those it constituted as Others. Foucault (1980a) argues that in the 1800s, class difference became identified through *respectability*, which was closely linked to sexuality and bodily discipline. Respectable bourgeois subjects exercised control over their bodies and bodily functions in opposition to the lower classes. Conversely, dirt and disease were associated with the “low-Other” (Stallybrass & White, 1986, p. 5). Stallybrass and White find that reformers’ and writers’ descriptions of the “filthy” slum were saturated with bourgeois moral connotations. The slum marks the boundaries between “high” and “low culture,” filth and cleanliness, bourgeois respectability and racialized degeneracy.

The disgust for the bodies and spaces of the poor described by Stallybrass and White, and Pile was common in Uruguayan society. In his study of “Uruguayan sensibility,” José Pedro Barrán (1995) writes that from the late 19th- to the early 20th-century, the bourgeoisie had an overarching concern about the “filthy habits of the poor.” Cleanliness was associated with health, and respectability. Barrán points out that beneath the veneer of concern, lay disgust for the economically marginalized:

*Detrás de la obsesión médica y social por la limpieza y la desinfección, también se halla el miedo al otro, encarnado casi siempre en el pobre, el habitante miserable, sucio y maloliente de los conventillos y los ranchos, un peligro tanto para el orden social establecido como para el orden higienista y la salud.*

(Beneath the medical and social obsession with cleanliness and disinfection, lies a fear of the other, embodied always by the poor, miserable resident of the *conventillos* and shanties, who is dirty and foul-smelling, and poses a danger for both the established social order and the hygienist order.)

(Barrán, 1995, p. 309)

This “medical and social obsession” is evident in public health campaigns, which targeted the poor, the racialized, and women (Guy, 1991, 2000; Stepan, 1991). I will return to this issue in chapter three in relation to the *conventillo* and its laundresses.

Stallybrass and White’s study is helpful for thinking through why the bodies of, and
spaces occupied by, “low-Others” became the source of both dread and fascination. They work out the powerful links between geography and class subjectivity:

we explore the contradictory constructions of bourgeois desire to which this led in the nineteenth century – a construction of subjectivity through totally ambivalent internalizations of the city slum, the domestic servant and the carnivalesque.

(Stallybrass & White, 1986, p. 21)

Compellingly, the three signifiers flagged by Stallybrass and White, “the city slum, the domestic servant and the carnivalesque” almost mirror those at work in representations and narratives of the conventillo. These spaces and bodies are particularly significant because of how they embody the “low,” and also the unstable boundaries between “high” and “low.” Stallybrass and White thus point to the necessity of thinking about how the marginalization of certain spaces is connected to the formation of dominant subjectivities, and inherently, to desire. Building on the work of Stallybrass and White, Pile summarizes how bodies come to mean through their geographies:

Metonymic chains of associations were built up around other low-Others: thus, slums were linked to dirt, dirt to sewage, sewage to disease, disease to moral degradation, and moral degradation to the slum-dweller or to the prostitute. Through metaphorical and metonymic association, the signifiers were elided; metaphor and metonymy enable the condensation and displacement of one expression with another; the entry into language is complicit in the social and psychic construction of an embodied urban geography mapped and remapped through power, disgust and desire.

(Pile, 1996, p. 180)

Living in what was considered a “low,” dirty place translated into being considered a lowly, immoral person. But, not only are the slum residents disdained, they are also the objects of fascination and desire. By connecting the realms of geography, the social, and the psyche, the authors reveal that what is “excluded at the overt level of identity-formation is productive of new objects of desire” (Stallybrass & White, 1986, p. 25).

What needs to be further worked out, however, is how the “fear, disgust, and desire” relate to the construction of citizenship and belonging. My thesis thus makes a critical intervention by connecting the scholarship on race, geography, and citizenship to the theorization of geography and desire. Looking at the conventillo through an analytic lens that attends to how desire is formed within historical, geographic, and power relations is critical to my analysis of the subjectivities that are produced through the
At the same time, I maintain a gaze upon how “structures of belonging” are constituted through the *conventillo*. Because, as explained in the introduction, the ideal Uruguayan subject is white and the *conventillo* is constituted as black, this means maintaining a gaze upon the dynamics between whiteness and blackness.

Derived from Raymond Williams’ (1977) conception of “structures of feeling,” and Edward Said’s (Said, 1979) “imaginative geographies,” structures of belonging describe the idea that “geographies of identity become embodied at the personal level, deriving from individual subject’s biographies and interpretative schema,” as they relate to “collective or shared geographies of identities, the ‘local codes of reception’ and imaginative geographies which ground collective identities” (Radcliffe & Westwood, 1996, p. 27). Belonging is a key feature of citizenship (Hage, 1998; Radcliffe, 1999a; Radcliffe & Westwood, 1996; L. Taylor & Wilson, 2004). As described in the last chapter, belonging is constructed through processes of identification (who is identified as belonging to the nation and who can identify with the nation) and through practices that draw boundaries around who belongs. The next chapter considers the tension between folklorization and belonging by examining how the *conventillo* is domesticated and feminized through folkloric images of the *conventillo* clotheslines and how this constitutes belonging for subjects who are associated with the *conventillo*. 
Chapter Three
Tensions of the Clotheslines: “Les encantaba ponernos uniforme a las negras”

Introduction: Genealogy of the Clotheslines

Poca gente sabe cuál es la pelea más grande. ¿cuál es el poder en el conventillo?, de las mujeres sobre todo: las cuerdas de lavar. Yo siempre digo, en el conventillo donde vivía hasta hace dos o tres años atrás, los líos por las cuerdas de lavar eran de todas las mañanas, ¿por qué? Porque la cuerda de lavar que da contra el sol, o donde el sol da más tiempo, es la que produce más. Lavo, cuelgo, seco y llevo, vendo y compro. Entonces a través de las cuerdas de lavar se genera una cultura o se generan ciertos elementos que no son de la sociedad real...

(Few people know what the biggest quarrel is in the conventillo. Where does the power lie in the conventillo – especially among the women? It is in the clotheslines. I always say in the conventillo – where I lived until two or three years ago – the ruckus over the clotheslines happened every morning. Why? Because the clothesline that gets the morning sun, or that gets the longest sun, produces the most. I wash, I hang, dry, I deliver, I sell and I buy. So a culture, or certain elements of a culture are generated through the clotheslines, certain elements that are not part of real society…) (Rodríguez, 2001, p. 151)

A frequent image that emerges from the conventillos of Barrio Sur and Palermo is that of the clotheslines and the laundresses. The clotheslines are depicted in photographs, paintings, and souvenirs, where flowing laundry and happy children form a picturesque tableau (see figures 5 and 6). Moreover, the laundress is a recurring figure in literary, historical, and biographical references to the conventillo and Afro-Uruguayan life (Britos, 1990, 1997; Cardoso, 2008; Kroch, 2004; Porzecanski & Santos, 2006). The image of the laundress is gendered as well as racialized. From the literary and autobiographical accounts we learn that everyone’s black mother, grandmother, wife, or sister was involved in taking in other people’s laundry or performing other types of domestic work. Indeed, it is the heavy over-representation of Afro-Uruguayan women within this sector and the recurrence of “clotheslines narratives” with respect to the conventillo that lead me
to write this chapter. In Uruguay, the economic and social positioning of Afro-Uruguayans has traditionally been explained as a matter of class inequity (for instance in C. M. Rama, 1967). This rationale, however, does not explain how Afro-Uruguayan women’s lives are circumscribed by their positioning as “natural” maids and laundresses.

In this sense, Uruguay is not unique. Throughout the Americas, domestic work is racialized as indicated by Radcliffe and Westwood:

It is not simply fortuitous that Clara is black; domestic servants are of African or indigenous descent throughout Latin America….but, the racialization and feminization of domestic work is so much part of the commonsense reality of Latin America that it is “invisible,” hidden by a series of articulations that appear initially to be contradictory.

(Radcliffe & Westwood, 1996, p. 29)

This chapter argues that the folklorization of the conventillo and the clotheslines is one of the ways that the racialization of domestic work is naturalized and made not only “invisible,” but natural. Furthermore, the prominence of the clotheslines as a way of representing the conventillo domesticates and feminizes the space. This insight is critical, when read alongside the following two chapters, which foreground the desires, anxieties, and disavowals produced through the conventillo’s blackness and black femininity.

Unlike the folkloric depictions of the clotheslines, Romero Rodríguez does not romanticize when he speaks of life in an Afro-Uruguayan conventillo. In an interview with anthropologist Sonnia Gorski (quoted in the epigraph) he recalls the daily fights over the best clotheslines. His story obviously points to the actions of the economically marginalized, “the competition for space,” and “the contest for daily life,” among low-income people throughout cities in Latin America (Jones, 1994, p. 2). Yet, there is another layer to the story. These living and working conditions seem to inform the subjectivity of the laundresses. Rodríguez hints at how conventillo women may come to understand themselves through their work. They are not a part of “real society,” because real society does not behave in this way.

This chapter investigates what is “generated through the clotheslines.” I enter the conventillo through “narratives of the clotheslines” – literary and autobiographical

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33 According to Rodríguez (2006, p. 170), at the beginning of this millenium approximately forty percent of Afro-Uruguayan women are employed in domestic work.
narratives by or about those involved in washing laundry or other domestic work – to foreground how convenillo women were positioned within Uruguayan society. This chapter makes visible how the convenillo constitutes particular embodiments, practices, and subjects. I show how these processes position subjects and shape “structures of belonging.” I reveal that the clotheslines generate geographies and embodiments that are outside the boundaries of respectability, and therefore, of “proper” belonging. Washing laundry and scrubbing floors is not a respectable occupation. Furthermore, the low valuation of, and the labour performed by, these racialized and economically marginalized women helped to define middle-class white femininity.

The convenillo clotheslines have a genealogy. The contemporary positioning of Afro-Uruguayan women within the labour market can be traced back to slavery, when enslaved women were primarily engaged in domestic work (Rodríguez, 2003, 2006). They worked as maids, wet nurses, cooks, and laundresses. Following abolition in 1852, a decree allowed the police to mandate that formerly enslaved women remain as servants in their masters’ houses if they did not conform to “good conduct” (Rodríguez, 2006, p. 34). Furthermore, black men and women entered a labour market marked by race and class divisions; for instance, they were prevented from joining trade unions (Rodriguez, 2001, p. 149). These conditions, everyday racism, and the lack of compensation for former slaves, meant that Afro-Uruguayans continued to be employed in the lowest paying sectors. For the women, this usually meant domestic work.

The construction of the convenillos in Barrio Sur and Palermo supported the previously existing relation between blackness and domestic work. As mentioned in chapter one, many Afro-Uruguayans first settled in the area following abolition. In her study of the history of social housing, Nydia Conti (1986) points out that the convenillos were often built with more laundry sinks than latrines. For instance, Medio Mundo had forty rooms, four latrines, and thirty-two sinks (Conti, 1986, p. 8). The large number of laundry sinks indicated the conception of this enclave as a continuing supplier of laundresses:

_Es de hacer notar que la abundancia de piletas de lavar en los convenillos de Barrio Sur repsonde a que las mujeres que allí se alojaron seguían siendo como en épocas anteriores, las lavanderas de las familias que habitaban las zonas residenciales Centro y Cordón._
(It is notable that the abundance of laundry sinks in the conventillos of Barrio Sur corresponds to the fact that the women who resided there carried on doing the work they had done previously as the laundresses of the families who inhabited the residential zones of Centro and Cordón.)

(Conti, 1986, p. 8)

Here, city planning clearly manifests a “desired social order” (Rama, 1996, p. 5). Populated by Afro-descendants, new immigrants, and the urban poor, it was expected that many of the women would be a source of domestic labour for other more affluent neighbours. Thus structural elements reproduced a previously existing division of labour along race, class, gender, and geographic lines. This geographical pattern is shared by other cities. In Buenos Aires, for instance, the conventillos were also a source of domestic labour for surrounding neighbours and neighbourhoods (Baer, 1994; Guy, 2000).

Domestic workers have historically occupied a lowly, yet highly charged position. Therefore I begin, in the next section, by discussing several studies, which theorize the social positioning of domestic servants and other “marginal” women within colonial and postcolonial societies (Guy, 2000; Radcliffe, 1990, 1999c; Rubbo & Taussig, 1983; Stoler, 1995). This is followed by a discussion of three terms that were used to describe conventillo women, the conventillera, the mundelera and the milonguita. Then, I analyze an evocative quarrel set in a conventillo courtyard in the play Carnaval de Lubolos by Andrés Castillo and Raúl Mené (1996). The quarrel evinces how racialized working-class conventillo women were not only positioned to perform certain types of work, but were also dehumanized when they did. Read alongside two autobiographical reflections, this section demonstrates how race, class, gender, sexuality, and geography work through embodiments and practices to mark conventillo women as less than respectable and therefore less than citizens. Lastly, I discuss several autobiographical accounts from Afro-Uruguayan women who grew up in the mid-1900s. These accounts come from Gularte (1998), Luna (1988b), Porzecanski and Santos (2006), and from personal

34 This is not to say that this type of work was not done by working class women in different parts of Montevideo. It was common for the middle and upper classes to hire women to do their domestic work in neighbourhoods across the city. Domestic work continues to be a major source of income for many racialized and working-class women today (Townsend-Bell, 2007).
interviews. This section foregrounds how the experience of being a black woman in this nation was and is circumscribed by the “domestication” of blackness and the racialization of domestic work. As Martha Gularte (in Porzecanski & Santos, 2006, p. 36) succinctly puts it, “Les encantaba ponernos uniforme a las negras” (They loved putting maid uniforms on us, the black girls.) These accounts also show how Afro-Uruguayan women negotiate and resist this positioning.

**Historical Overview: The Stigma of Domestic Work**

Female service embodies and molds something basic to all interpersonal relations of power…in all societies where female service is common. (Rubbo & Taussig, 1983, p. 6)

Studies of different historical settings show that the domestic servant, like the prostitute, embodies far more than labour (McClintock, 1995; Palmer, 1989; Rubbo & Taussig, 1983; Radcliffe, 1990, 1999; Stallybrass & White, 1986; Stoler, 1995). She is a crucial point of contact between social groups that are distinguished by race and class. Her symbolic significance has been theorized to be connected to constituting the respectability of the bourgeoisie. In 19th-century Europe, the emerging middle-class lacked “a means and therefore had to invent one, for defining itself” (McClintock, 1995, p. 100). Michel Foucault (1990) argues that class difference became identified through respectability, which was closely linked to sexuality. Respectable bourgeois subjects exercised control over their bodies and bodily functions in opposition to the lower classes. Moreover, respectable subjects had other people to clean up their filth (McClintock, 1995). Given the history of slavery, black women particularly embody the “servant” role in South and North America (Palmer, 1989; Radcliffe & Westwood, 1996; D. Roberts, 1994).

Building on Foucault, Ann Laura Stoler (1995; 1997) shows that the relationality between servants and the bourgeoisie was gendered, racialized, and eroticized. Stoler studied the precarious positioning of native servants within the colonial household in the 19th-century Dutch East Indies. In this context, “being a less well-to-do woman and of mixed descent coded a range of social relations as erotically driven, sensually charged, and sexually precocious by definition” (Stoler, 1995, p. 115). As “others” who worked within the bourgeois home, native servants provoked anxieties. Their presence threatened
to erode class and racial distinctions and to imbue bourgeois children with their presumed degenerate values. Furthermore, the colonizing class feared that physical proximity would lead to sexual encounters and racial boundaries would be blurred by “mixed-blood” offspring. At the same time, Stoler (1995, p. 146) notes that these racialized others were necessary to demarcate the social hierarchy, for it was “the servant class against which the boundaries of the bourgeois self were drawn.”

Anne McClintock (1995), like Stallybrass and White (1986) before her, draws attention to how the discourses on “dirt” were connected to the bourgeois conception of servants and sexuality. Stallybrass and White (1986) establish that the lower classes embodied the degradation that the dominant discourse equated with their living spaces (the slums). McClintock emphasizes that being identified with dirt (through dirty jobs, dirty surroundings) and menial labour marked the working class. In contrast, cleanliness (of the body and the home) and leisure characterized the middle class. There was, however, an underlying attraction to domestic servants, given their role in performing intimate caregiving and the supposed sexual proclivities of the lower classes. Again, Stallybrass and White’s (1986, p. 25) contention is critical; “what is excluded at the overt level of identity-formation is productive of new objects of desire.” McClintock’s examination of the relationship between a middle-class “gentleman,” Arthur Munby, and a “lowly drudge,” Hannah Cullwick, shows how dirt signified both labour and sexuality, becoming entangled in a complex economy of desire. Domestic servants embodied the multiple meanings and contradictions associated with class difference:

Like prostitutes and female miners, servants stood on the dangerous threshold of normal work, normal money and normal sexuality, and came to be figured increasingly in the iconography of “pollution,” “disorder,” “plagues,” “moral contagion” and racial “degeneration.”

(McClintock, 1995, p. 154)

The discourse of dirt bled into the discourse on sexual terpitude, disease, and moral contagion. “Repugnance and fascination are the twin poles of the process in which a political imperative to reject and eliminate the debasing ‘low’ conflicts powerfully and unpredictably with a desire for this Other” (Stallybrass & White, 1986, pp. 6-7).

Donna Guy’s (2000) study of public health policy in Argentina from the late 19th-to the early 20th-century makes a direct connection between conceptions of the “lowly”
domestic, the prostitute, morality, disease, and nation-building. Emerging nations in the 19th-century were particularly invested in projecting modernity through a healthy “national body.” In Latin America this spawned the hygienist movement, which united physicians, politicians, and police forces in campaigns to “cleanse” the city of dirt and disease (Costábile, 2002b; Guy, 2000; Lavrin, 1995; Stepan, 1991). The hygienists had a moral, as well as a scientific, rhetoric. Specific populations were singled out as propagating disease. Guy reveals that while the working class as a whole was suspect, public health discourses and practices were gendered. The “habits” of women who lived in tenements were seen as leading to illness and contagion. Rather than focusing on their impoverished living conditions, the plight of the poor was cast as a problem of pathological morality. Prostitutes and laundresses were targeted as the most “dangerous” culprits because of their close contact with many people (Guy, 2000, p. 126). Through their work, these women threatened bodily, geographic, gender, and class boundaries. (Guy does not talk much about the racial transgressions that may have also caused anxieties.) Guy documents the various regulations and practices enacted to restrict the behaviour of women in these occupations. She makes a direct link between the ascription of immorality and the loss of rights:

In the process of implementing their programs, capitalism, gender, and morality became inextricably linked as public health became one means of denoting the limits of one’s place and one’s rights within civil society.

(Guy, 2000, p. 123)

In the “hygienist state,” being perceived as the embodiment of “filth” and “immorality” resulted in diminished citizenship.

Uruguayan public health physicians were also pioneers in the hygienist field. They likewise targeted racialized and impoverished populations in campaigns to “improve” the “race” (Costábile, 2002a; Lavrin, 1995; Sapriza, 2003; Stepan, 1991). Again, this discourse was gendered. José Pedro Barrán notes that prostitutes and servants were envisioned as the carriers of disease to other classes:

La tuberculosis y la sífilis son modos de venganza de las clases sociales desposeídas (...) la prostituta y sirvienta, salidas del hogar, arrojadas al arroyo, están encargadas de llevar (las enfermedades) hacia los palacios, depositarlos allí y matar niños e idiotizar adolescentes.
(Tuberculosis and syphilis are the vengeance of the dispossessed classes….the prostitute and the servant, thrown from their homes to the gutters, are in charge of taking (these diseases) to the palaces, and deposit them there to kill children and stupefy adolescents.)

(Barrán, as cited in Costábile, 2002, p. 42)

Prostitutes were heavily policed from the 19th to the early 20th-century (Lavrin, 1995; Trochon, 1998). They were required to live and work in specific areas and submit to registration and medical examinations. Working-class women, not middle class men, were regarded as the transmitters of venereal diseases (Barrán, 2004; Lavrin, 1995; Trochon, 1998).

Moving into the second half of the 20th-century, domestic work continued to be racialized and gendered across Latin America (Momsen, 1999; Radcliffe, 1990, 1999c; Radcliffe & Westwood, 1996; Rubbo & Taussig, 1983). Two insightful studies show the pivotal role played by the domestic/employer relation in articulating national hierarchies that are gendered, racialized, and classed (Radcliffe, 1990; Rubbo & Taussig, 1983). Anna Rubbo and Michael Taussig (1983, p. 6) insist that “female domestic service is an essential link between the macrostructure of political life and the microstructure of domestic and personal existence which prepares and sustains people for their roles in society.” Their study of households in Cali, Colombia shows how the live-in domestic and the employing family learn of their place in society through this relationship:

The relationships between family members and servants form a crucial medium by which the psychological terrain of class and sexist practices is nourished....The existence of the servant ensures that the household microcosm more fully functions so as to absorb much of the psychic damage effected by this structure of relationships, and in doing so more firmly perpetuates the root causes.

(Rubbo & Taussig, 1983, p. 15)

Looking at a Peruvian locale, Radcliffe (1990) makes explicit that the domestic/employer relation within the bourgeois home articulates the national racial project. Radcliffe studied a neighbourhood in Lima where most of the employers identified as white and ranged from middle- to upper-class. Most of the live-in domestic workers were Indigenous rural migrants. In these households, there was an ongoing negotiation of ethnic boundaries that was informed by, and reproduced, the dominant
racial discourse. Peruvian nationalism promotes the idea of a homogeneous nation produced through *mestizaje* (racial mixture), therefore Indigenous people must be whitened. The live-in domestic workers were encouraged/coerced to become “whiter” (more *mestizo*, less Indigenous) by emulating the dress, language, and customs of their employers, as they learned to disparage their own. And, while the “help” was encouraged to assimilate, an ethnic/class difference was always maintained. The maid wore hand-me-downs. She could not afford to buy her own clothing. She learned to be ashamed of her people and also of her work. Furthermore, derogatory terms for mixedness, such as *chola*, imply “a transformation among the female migrants, but at the same time denigrates them for not belonging fully to the established order of Peruvian society” (Radcliffe, 1990, p. 384). Thus, Radcliffe argues:

> Domestic service is both a vehicle for and the outcome of the process of *mestizaje*, that is, the construction of a homogeneous nation from diverse ethnic groups on terms defined by the upper and middle classes.  
> (Radcliffe, 1990, p. 383)

The domestic/employer relation reinforces and constitutes existing hierarchies.

The studies reviewed in this section establish that not only is the domestic servant – like the prostitute – a heavily stigmatized figure, she is also heavily disciplined. In addition, the domestic worker plays a highly charged role within the bourgeois household. She both embodies, and threatens to disrupt, the class/racial/gender/sexual boundaries that are implicated in defining respectability and the nation itself.

Given this backdrop, I now turn to the specificities that constructed *conventillo* women by investigating three terms that were used to describe them. These appellations show that the *conventillo* woman embodied immorality, as well as menial work and prostitution. In fact, my research shows that there is a blurring of these categories both in representation and in practice.

**Scandalous Women: The Conventillera, the Milonguita, and the Mundelera**

> La mordacidad de quienes seguramente no vivieron en conventillos, motejó de “conventillera” a cualquier vecina que se hubiera hecho notar como discutidora, escandalosa, chismosa o intrigante – y mejor aún si era todo eso a la vez – aunque fuera evidente que esas condiciones no eran exclusivas de aquellas pobres mujeres que no tuvieron más remedio que vivir en un conventillo.
(The cruelty of those who surely did not live in the *conventillos*, led them to call “*conventillera*” any neighbour who was notoriously argumentative, scandalous, gossipy or scheming – better yet if she was all at once – even if it was evident that these characteristics were not exclusive to those poor women who had no choice but to live in a *conventillo*.)

(Pi Hugarte, 2001, p. 7)

There were at least three colloquial and derogatory terms that applied to *conventillo* women in the early to mid 20th-century, the *conventillera*, the *milonguita*, and the *mundelera*. *Conventillera* referred to a quarrelsome, unruly woman. As Pi Hugarte indicates above, it was used condescendingly by those outside the *conventillos*. This quarrelsome figure is also present in various literary sources such as Cardoso (1992) and Castillo and Mené (1996, discussed below). The *conventillera* is also tacitly present in Rodríguez’s comments above about the quarrels over the clotheslines. These three terms confirm Eric Lott’s contention that:

> Working-class women (white and black) and black men in bourgeois cultural fantasy are figures for a thrilling and repellent sexual anarchy. If in an age of separate spheres women were responsible for household order and spiritual hygiene, all that was dirty, disruptive, and disorderly was projected onto working-class women.

(Lott, 1995, p. 122)

The *milonguita* is a character featured in tango lyrics. It refers to a woman, typically born in the *conventillo*, who deploys her beauty in the tango bars in search of well-to-do men and a way out of poverty. Hernán Feldman (2006) looks at how the tragedy of the *milonguita* became a staple of tango lyrics in the early to mid 20th-century. In these songs, the *milonguita* betrays her working-class origins and leads a life of prostitution. According to most lyrics, she escapes poverty only for a short time and is eventually felled by revenge (from a resentful man of her class), disease (due to her vices), or deception (by a man, who disposes of her after a short flirtation). The *milonguita* usually dies by the end of the song. Feldman provides a synopsis of the *milonguita’s* trajectory, which is culled from the pages of a 1927 issue of *Crítica*, an Argentine magazine:35

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35 While Feldman is referring to the Argentine context, tango and the *conventillo* are shared cultural and social phenomena of the River Plate region.
In the first box we can see humble women washing clothes in the patio of a typical shanty house, popularly known as *conventillo*, as a baby girl attempts her first steps. This image is accompanied by the caption “her cradle was a kerosene-lit *conventillo*” (Arteche, 1927, p. 11), which evokes Alberto Vacarezza’s farce *Tu cuna fue un conventillo* (1920) and the lyrics of the tango *Flor de fango* (1917).

The life story progresses through the *milonguita’s* adolescence in a factory, her first love and her first tango steps, which are portrayed as the “threshold of a cabaret” (Arteche, 1927, p. 11) in which the *milonguita* will become a cocaine addict. Finally, the *milonguita* meets her death “in the white and cold bed of a cold and white hospital” (Arteche, 1927, p. 11), which corresponds to the lyrics of Vacarezza’s tango “*Era una paica papusa*.”

(Feldman, 2006, p. 1)

For Feldman, such tango lyrics aligned with the hygienist message against vice. He posits that while tango songs cautioned poor women not to stray from their class, they also indirectly addressed middle-class women. They served as a cautionary tales, warning women what might happen if they left the bourgeois home for the seemingly glamorous, yet sordid, night life. Simultaneously, respectable women could enter the night-club vicariously through the tango lyrics. Thus, the *milonguita’s* tragedy potentially disciplined and titillated middle-class women (Feldman, 2006, p. 12). Like Guy, Feldman’s insightful study does not consider the extent to which the *milonguita* mediates racial, as well as gender and class, norms. This is a crucial omission for the prostitute is always a racialized figure in modern nation-states (Razack, 1998). As Razack (1998, p. 346) argues, “prostitution [is] always about race, class, and gender, even when the prostitutes are white,” because the encounter in prostitution is inherently about securing a hegemonic masculinity, which is white and middle-class.

*Mundelera* is a term that questions the morality of the Afro-Uruguayan woman. The root word is *mundo* (world), so this term can be roughly translated as “woman who gets around.” It may thus also reference Medio Mundo. It is a “pejorative term, used by the Afro-ethnic group to designate the black woman who forms a couple with a white man, who is in a better socio-economic position, with the hopes of social ascension” (Britos, 1997, p. 37). This stereotype is of course not unique to this neighbourhood. The idea that black women betray their race by “marrying up” exists in other settings. It is the basis of the “mulatto escape hatch” in Brazil, the myth that black people can whiten themselves to become more affluent (Degler, 1971). The *mundelera* is found in at least
two poems by Afro-Uruguayan poet José Carlos Santos Barboza. Barboza was born in Melo, department of Cerro Largo in 1917 and moved to Montevideo in 1925. His poems appear in Antología de poetas negros uruguayos. Tomo II (Britos, 1997). The first poem carries the title Mundelera. I will quote the second one, which is titled Lavanderas de Medio Mundo (Evocación del Sur), (The Laundresses of Medio Mundo: Evocation of Sur). The title at first suggests that it might be a tribute to these hard-working women. Instead, Barboza chastizes the laundresses of Medio Mundo for being mundeleras:

Baila mulata  
que se desatan cuando requiebras  
dos cabras locas bajo tu bata.  
....  
No es nada  
mulata color de luna  
mazumba cachugán, güé.  
Fruto de amor dolorosa  
de la negra enamorada y el blanco.  
que amó y se fue....

(Dance mulata  
because when you flirt you unleash  
two wild goats from under your skirts  
...  
It is nothing  
mulata, colour of the moon  
mazumba cachugán, güé.  
Fruit of the hurtful love  
between a black woman, who loved a white man,  
who loved and left…)  

(José Carlos Santos Barboza in Britos, 1997, p. 39)

The poet makes efforts to locate himself within an Afro-Latin literary tradition. His incorporation of an African syntax (mazumba cachugán, güé) draws upon the avant-garde Afro-Caribbean poets of the 1930s including Nicolas Guillén (Cuba), Luis Palés-Matos (Puerto Rico) and Manuel del Cabral (Dominican Republic). It is also apparent that the author reiterates dominant notions about hypersexual black femininity. Here the black

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37 I thank Néstor Rodríguez for pointing this out.  
38 The hypersexuality of black femininity is a stereotype that has oft been noted (Chaves, 2006; Hill-Collins, 1990; Philip, 1997; D. Roberts, 1994). In a Mundo Uruguayo short story, for instance, the white heroine is “blackened” by her overt sexuality. In the story, titled Un Disfraz de Morocha (A dark woman’s
laundress is presumed to have unrequited relations with white men. In Barboza’s poem, the mixed-race woman embodies the failed attempt at social climbing, as well as the initial betrayal by her black mother. Streicker (1995) notes a similar trend in a black, working-class neighbourhood in Santa Ana in Cartagena, Colombia, where women who overstepped gender norms were labeled immoral and “blackened.”

My analysis so far indicates that conventillo women were positioned as having a questionable morality, through which middle-class respectability could be defined. She was judged by her neighbours, as well as the upper classes. And, in contrast to the rural domestic workers referenced in other studies (Radcliffe & Westwood, 1996; Rubbo & Taussig, 1983), these women were not seen as gullible. They were “worldly” and “got around.” Middle-class women might have learned about the frailty of respectability through the figures of the mundelera and the milonguita. There is evidence of this relationality in the recollections from more “respectable” immigrant neighbourhoods in Barrios montevideanos con memorias (A. M. Pehar, Pérez, M., & Urrutia, C., 2005). Several of the women interviewed here recall that growing up in the mid-1900s, they were warned against going to places where tango was danced. Specific neighbourhoods, or even night clubs within their own neighbourhoods, were off limits for respectable young women. Respectability was spatialized.

Lastly I want to draw attention to how these stereotypes libidinize the conventillo woman. Alongside the disdain, there is a hint of desire for the sexually loose mundelera or milonguita. Given this backdrop, it is not surprising that the theme of respectability looms large in literary and biographical accounts of the conventillo (for instance Cardoso, 1992; Castillo & Mené, 1996). In the next section, I enter the conventillo courtyard through the play Carnaval de Lubolos and several autobiographical accounts to show how conventillo women (or those who embodied the conventillo) may have been haunted by the spectre of the conventillera, the mundelera and the milonguita.

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costume), a man tells a blonde woman that she seems “morena” (black or dark) because of her sexually provocative behaviour (Montenegro, 1944, p. 82).
Carnaval de Lubolos: Contextualizing the Play

Carnaval de Lubolos is a 34 page play written by Andrés Castillo and Raúl Mené and staged in 1966. The play was published in Juanamaría Cordones-Cook’s (1996) ¿Teatro negro uruguayo? Texto y contexto del teatro afro-uruguayo de Andrés Castillo, a book that critically examines the work of Andrés Castillo with the Teatro Negro Uruguayo (Black Uruguayan Theatre). This theatre company was formed by two white Uruguayan lawyers, Francisco Merino (1911-1982) and Castillo (1920-2004), who had a strong background in independent theatre. Raúl Mene (b. 1934) was a middle-class Afro-Uruguayan, who attended the seminary and law school before becoming a writer. According to Cordones-Cook, this theatre company was founded in 1963 as a type of social service, in order to serve members of the Afro-Uruguayan community in Barrio Sur and Palermo. Cordones-Cook writes that they saw education as their mission:

Merino aspiraba alfabetizar y educar al negro a partir de las artes dramáticas con clases de idiomas, de inglés en particular, de culturas africanas, de emisión de voz, canto coral y movimiento escénico y danza.

(Merino hoped to bring literacy and education to the black [people] from the point of view of dramatic arts, language classes, particularly English. They also provided instruction in African cultures, voice training, choral singing, movement, and dance.)

(Cordones-Cook, 1996, p. 33)

The company produced plays using local people, not trained actors. The plays attempted to “rescue” Afro-Uruguayan traditions (Cordones-Cook, 1996, p. 35). I focus on the play, Carnaval de Lubolos, which is set in a conventillo courtyard. The play showcases Afro-Uruguayan culture by following the characters as they prepare for carnival in the midst of daily hardships, gossip, and quarrels. Set in a 1920s conventillo, which is reminiscent of Medio Mundo, the play is filtered through the 1960s, the time when it was written. Written in this context, I find that Carnaval de Lubolos presents a very typical representation of conventillo life that corresponds with many popular depictions. All of the action takes place in the courtyard, the heart of the conventillo. There are children playing, men who are arguing, talking, fighting over work, and playing the drums. The women are engaged in laundering, gossiping, and arguing. The play thus
reproduces some of the stereotypical ways that conventillo dwellers are usually represented, but also provides insights into the hierarchies that organized the space.

**Inside the Conventillo Courtyard: A Quarrel over Respectability**

Aspects of identity or self develop in relationship to place (people make their homes), but places set a brute limit on what individuals can make of themselves (homes make people). The home is not simply an expression of an individual’s identity, it is also constitutive of that identity.

(Pile, 1996, p. 55)

I focus on one scene, which features a quarrel between three conventillo women. By focusing on this scene, I am not assuming that this is an authentic portrayal of the conventillo. Instead, I believe that the play reveals popular perceptions of these women at the time and how these may have informed their sense of self. The scene begins with several women discussing the merits of domestic work versus its alternative, prostitution. A quarrel erupts. Mabel, a white woman who works as a prostitute, is being verbally attacked for her vocation by two black women, Mirta and Dolores. Mabel retaliates by denigrating them and their jobs as maids,

¡Mirá vos las dos princesas! ¡De tanto leer novelas se les están subiendo los títulos a la cabeza! ¿Y uds….qué hacen? ¡Lavar pisos! ¡Mirá que lindo trabajo! ¡Sacar la mugre de los demás!

(look at the two of you! The two princesses! From reading so many novels, the titles are going to your head! And the two of you …what do you do? Clean floors! Look at that, what a nice job! Cleaning other people’s filth!)

(Castillo & Mené, 1996, p. 127)

For Mabel, washing other people’s filth is not much different from selling your body. Her position is the flip side of the fact that, “domestic service for many women is only slightly better an occupation than begging and prostitution” (Radcliffe, 1990, p. 390). Shame comes with being a domestic servant, as it does with prostitution. It is “filthy work” with little “social value” (McClintock, 1995b, p. 156). Mabel feels that her “choice” is more glamorous and superior to that of the other women. She emphasizes her point by posing provocatively to show off her (white) beauty. Dolores and Mirta remind Mabel that she is hardly considered a model citizen. While Mabel is posing, Dolores remarks, “¿Te vas a sacar una foto?” (Are you getting your photo taken?) And, Mirta
pipes in sarcastically, “Presentate al concurso de Mundo Uruguayo, a lo mejor sacas premio.” (Why don’t you enter the Mundo Uruguayo contest? Maybe you’ll win a prize.)

*Mundo Uruguayo* was a weekly news magazine, founded in 1919. Its social pages displayed the goings-on of high society. A perusal of the pages of *Mundo Uruguayo* reveals the construction of a feminine ideal that is young, white, bourgeois, and sexually pure. Some common images include the lavish fifteen-year-old debutante balls, and dances at society clubs. Groups of privileged teenage girls in white dresses are supervised by chaperones. White, “niños bien” (well-to-do boys) gaze at them admiringly, but never lasciviously. In *Mundo Uruguayo*, respectable white femininity may be beautiful, but not sexualized. Furthermore, it is never poor. The possibility of feminine respectability, then, comes about only through a particular configuration of race, class, gender, and a closely guarded sexuality. The *Mundo Uruguayo* representations correspond to the Uruguayan feminine ideal of the time (as described by Ehrick, 2005; Trochon, 1998). If middle-class women learned about the limits of respectability through the *milonguita* and the *conventillera*, *conventillo* women learned about respectable femininity from novels and magazines that portrayed something that they were not.

The mention of *Mundo Uruguayo* is significant. As indicated in chapter one, advertisements, films, and consumer items can transmit the national ideals (McKittrick, 2000). In citing a popular magazine (and also novels), Castillo and Mené are perhaps referencing one of the ways that immigrants and working class people accessed information about the national norms. This view is supported by Manuel Puig, an Argentine novelist who made a similar use of popular culture in his novels. Puig’s early works were informed by his upbringing in a rural town. In an interview, Puig (in Lavers, 1988, pp. 12-13) explains that growing up in a largely immigrant, working-class setting, the youth had few models who could impart the local language and culture to them. They learned about the “national capital” through women’s magazines, films, and radio songs. Castillo and Mené’s characters likewise learn of inaccessible worlds through magazines and novels. “Real society” is to be found in the pages of *Mundo Uruguayo*.

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39 Thanks to Eva-Lyn Jagoe for pointing out this similarity.
40 I am referring to Hage’s (1998) concept (introduced in chapter two) that belonging is constituted through degrees of national capital, which can refer to phenotypic markers as well as practices.
Returning to the play, it is obvious that the courtyard women are not just arguing about employment choices. They are attacking each other’s respectability and morality. What is at stake is each character’s own “toehold on respectability” and therefore citizenship (Fellows & Razack, 1998). Mabel, Mirta, and Dolores are engaged in occupations that have been historically deemed degenerate and they are deeply aware of it. The fact that the women are limited by race, class, and gender hierarchies does not prevent them from deploying them against each other. Mabel’s slurs are racially textured. She contrasts “two [black] princesses” “cleaning floors” to her white beauty. Mirta and Dolores attack Mabel’s sexual practices reminding her that she in no way embodies the norms of Mundo Uruguayo, and therefore, of Uruguayan society. The sexuality of the black women is suspect as well. In fact, I would argue that it is the blurring of social boundaries within the confines of the conventillo that leads to attempts to reinstall them. Mabel’s race privilege is volatile. Those who are constituted as less than the normative ideal are always in a slippery relation to whiteness (Dyer, 1997). Mirta and Dolores, on the other hand, are burdened by their association with filth, blackness, and domestic work. The stereotypes of the oversexed black woman and the morally loose laundress coalesce around their figures. All three are marked by their geography. By the end of the scene, the quarrel escalates to name-calling and physical violence, which the men must break up. Arguably, the authors are tacitly affirming the mainstream view that conventillo women lack civility.

Rather than focus on the women’s potential rivalries, however, I want to examine how the quest for respectability illustrates how “the national discourse is gendered [and racialized] in a rather disturbing fashion” (Silva, 1998, p. 227). Underpinning the quarrel, I argue, is the connection between racialized, classed, gendered practices, and respectability and citizenship. Nobody wins the quarrel. They all realize that they are not Mundo Uruguayo women. Respectable Uruguayan women are neither selling their bodies, nor cleaning others people’s filth. They are neither black, nor poor. Their everyday lives never cross the conventillo wall. Reading the courtyard quarrel historically and intertextually reveals that “belonging, and narratives of national and personal identity, are differentially available,” to differently located and embodied subjects (Radcliffe, 1999a, p. 224). For the conventillo women, race, class, and gender interlock
to constitute them as suitable for only marginal work and this work, in turn, embodies something less than respectability. Where they live and what they do marks them as less than fully belonging. The multiple meanings mapped upon these women through space, spatial practices, and representations resonate with Pile’s insight that “the body and the city are cartographies of meaning and identity; they are intensifying grids of power, desire and disgust” (Pile, 1996, p. 178)

I now turn to an autobiographical reflection from Rosa Luna that mirrors the feelings of exclusion from respectable society discernible in the play. For Rosa Luna, these feelings arise as a direct function of being a conventillo maid (Pierri, 1994). Rosa Luna (1933-1994) grew up in Medio Mundo and eventually became a famous Carnival vedette (see chapter five). Growing up in an impoverished home, she was initiated into domestic work when she was nine years old. Once she reached adolescence she learned that her race, class, gender, and occupation made her sexual prey for male employers:

Los conocí cuando tenía que ponerme cofía y delantal, como en las películas. Yo, negra y sirvienta, de cofía y delantal y ellos, entre sus libros y sus lujos, tratando de manosearme a la menor oportunidad. Y yo qué podía hacer? Contarle a las patronas? Ellas no me creían? Cómo creerle a una pobre negra? Y así fui aprendiendo en vivo y en directo cómo es la gente rica. No te digo qu todos los ricos son iguales, pero la mayoría es así. Ellos se creen los dueños de la gente, los dueños del mundo. Hacen con vos lo que quieren y si te resistís te despiden, porque sirvientas pueden encontrar en cualquier lado.

(I met them [the moralists] when I had to put on a maid’s uniform and there they were, in the midst of their books and luxuries, trying to grope me at every turn. What could I do? Tell the boss? They [the female employers] wouldn’t believe me. Who would believe a poor black woman? I am not telling you that all of the rich are the same, but the majority is that way. They believe that they own people, that they own the world. They do what they like with you and if you resist, they fire you.)

(Rosa Luna in, Pierri, 1994, p. 126)

In this passage, Rosa Luna is referring to the “moralists,” people who looked down upon prostitutes. She condemns the abjection faced by women who enter prostitution, while the “respectable” men of the employing class violate the women who “serve” them. Her testimony concurs with ample evidence that sexual “service” is often a part of domestic work (Radcliffe, 1990, 1999a, 1999c; Rubbo & Taussig, 1983). Working within the private sphere of the home makes domestic workers vulnerable to sexual violence. The typical servant’s status as a racialized, poor woman makes her an available, violable
body. This situation is repeated throughout the Americas as indicated by Radcliffe (1999a):

> Not to be a white woman means being vulnerable to casual – sometimes violent – sexual relations with men, relations that reiterate the moment of conquest. Servants, informal-sector workers and recently arrived migrants are frequently subject to sexual harassment, while middle-class men often lose their virginity with the domestic.

(Radcliffe, 1999a, p. 223)

Black women, particularly embody the sexualized domestic role, given the historical insertion of their ancestors through slavery (Browning, 1995). Enslaved women were subject to the sexual abuses of their masters. The ongoing perpetuation of these roles is highlighted by a comment in Robin Sheriff’s study of race in Brazil. A white male informant remarks: “When I was an adolescent, this initiation was in the red light area [with prostitutes] or with an empregada [maid]. The empregada, in most cases, was a negra” (Sheriff, 2001, p. 175). Rosa Luna’s account highlights how – domestic or prostitute – the sexual degradation of black/working-class women constitutes the respectability of the men and women who employ them. The racialized, inexperienced young maid becomes the “immoral” one who is judged by bourgeois society. In chapter five, I build upon the links between the black domestic and white desire when I examine Rosa Luna’s performance. Here, however, Rosa Luna claims that the distance between domestic work and prostitution is not very far:

> Por esto muchas mandan todo al carajo y terminan en la prostitución. Las empujan a eso. Llegan a la prostitución buscando salir de la pobreza, de la humillación, de esa vida de mierda que yo conocí desde chiquita. Vos pensás que son felices haciendo eso? Lo que pasa es que no les dejan otro camino. Después salen los moralistas a decir esto y aquello, pero yo sé muy bien cómo son muchos de esos moralistas.

(Rosa Luna in, Pierri, 1994, p. 126)

Rosa Luna herself did turn to the night-clubs and prostitution for a time before achieving national success as a performer. But even then, she was haunted by her past. She was
particularly outraged that she was not accepted to compete in a pageant for ACSUN, an Afro-Uruguayan society in Barrio Sur and Palermo, because she had once been a “lady of the night.”

I interviewed Rosa Luna’s contemporary and friend, Lagríma Ríos, who recounted an experience that showed the slipperiness of her respectability and belonging, despite her stature as a world-renowned tango singer. Lagríma’s background differed somewhat from Rosa Luna’s. She grew up in the same neighbourhood in a casa de inquilinato, a type of rooming house mentioned in chapter one. Her family was also of very humble background – her mother was a maid and her father a dockworker – but she was more sheltered growing up. Lagríma’s career was launched at eighteen when a passerby heard her impressive voice and this resulted in her first job, a booking to sing at a club. Her parents were very guarded about her performances. They made sure she was chaperoned.

_Bueno, cuando comencé con dieciocho años a cantar...siempre me gusto cantar y cuando comencé mis padres me dejaron. Porque vengo de una época en que los padres eran los que regían nuestra vida, no? Si ellos te querían dejar salir acá al lado te dejaban, si no, no._

(Well I started to sing at eighteen...I always like to sing and I began when my parents allowed me. Because I come from a time, in which our parents ruled our lives, right. If they wanted to let you go next door, they let you. If not, no.)

(Lagríma Ríos, 2006, personal communication, her emphasis)

As Lagríma points out, her parents’ actions were a sign of the times. It was common for young Montevideo women to be chaperoned up until at least the mid 1900s (Markarian, 1998; A. M. Pehar, Pérez, & Urrutia, 2005). But, while the quest for respectability did not distinguish conventillo women from others, its elusiveness probably did. Years later, after becoming a renowned tango singer, Lagríma Ríos was reminded of her vulnerable relationship to respectability when she played at an event for the Uruguayan embassy in

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41 Lagríma Ríos (born Lida Nelba Benavídez in 1924-2006) was an internationally renowned tango singer, who was born in the city of Durazno, but resided in Barrio Sur since her childhood. Ríos was also a political activist and was an honorary president of Mundo Afro, an Afro-Uruguayan cultural and political organization. I interviewed Ríos in July, 2006, just a few months before her death.

42 Lagríma Ríos was photographed outside of Medio Mundo for one of her first albums. She believed that this was to highlight the site’s cultural significance, since she had no personal connection to the residents until later on.
Germany. There she was humiliated by the differential treatment she received, including having to enter the embassy through the back door. By this time Lagríma had been welcomed internationally and she found it particularly painful to be rejected by someone who was representing the nation, “Porque es muy triste llegar a un lugar y que seas rechazada porque no eres blanca.” (Because it is very sad to arrive somewhere and to be rejected because you are not white) (Ríos, 2006, personal communication).

I want to end this section by returning to Carnaval de Lubolos and a character who is not a typical conventillera. Adriana is a young black woman, who is set apart by her aspiration for another life in another place. She is more educated than the rest; the other women listen as Adriana reads magazines and romantic novels to the group. Adriana is beautiful and chaste. Although several men vie for her attention, she rejects them all. Adriana initially seems independent and without need for a man, but by the end of the play she decides to leave the conventillo to run off to the country with Pedro. He is a young black man, fresh from the countryside. Pedro embodies country naïvete, as opposed to the other conventillo men who range from lazy charlatans to hustlers to hard-working chumps. As in the romantic novels that Adriana reads, patriarchal relations, feminine purity, and pastoral landscapes are the key to an imaginary happy ending. Her decision is clearly motivated by spatial – as much as romantic – desires. When she announces she is leaving, Adriana says, “Sí, me voy. Y me voy con Pedro! Al campo! A donde haya aire libre! No soporto más estas cuatro paredes.” (Yes, I’m leaving with Pedro! For the country! Where there is fresh air! I can’t stand these four walls anymore!) (Castillo & Mené, 1996, p. 144). The country-side holds out the promise of newness and innocence for the young couple. Adriana recognizes that the only possibility for respectability/happiness may lie in leaving the geography of “filth” and “degeneracy,” the conventillo. While Adriana leaves the conventillo, it is not clear whether the conventillo leaves her?

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43 The concert marked the celebration of August 25, Uruguay’s Independence Day.
44 The reader/audience may be left with further doubts about the happy ending. At this time period, patterns of migration were directed from the country to the city, given limited opportunities in rural areas. Furthermore, earlier in the play, in the excerpts that Adriana read from the romance novels, the authors emphasize the whiteness embodied by the heroines, and a pastoral landscape that is to be found only in fantasy. For instance, one passage Adriana reads is: “La joven condesa, bella como una virgen italiana, reposaba a la orilla del viejo lago cubierto de blancos celajes, envuelta en un largo traje blanco como la nieve y cubierta con un ancho sombrero rodeado de tules y gasas impolutas.” (The young countess,
In the next section, I discuss the autobiographical reflections of several women, who are marked by the *conventillo* and blackness. These women were not only steered towards domestic work, but they were reminded of it and/or disciplined when they stepped beyond the clotheslines.

*“Les encantaba ponernos uniforme a las negras”: Afro-Uruguayan Women and the Domestication of Blackness*

Thinking through the spatialities of power also implies that identity construction rests upon the disciplining of bodies within certain sites, which then resonate with meaning for the interpellated subjects.

(Radcliffe, 1999b, p. 226)

Domestic work is of course not the sole purview of Afro-Uruguayan women. Many women’s lives, however, were (and are) circumscribed by the idea that racialized women belong in the sphere of domestic work. Indeed, rare is the black woman has not passed through this experience. Education, often thought of as the “solution” to poverty, has not exempted Afro-Uruguayan women from domestic work. Luz (2001, p. 29) points out that the women who propelled the black publication *Nuestra Raza* in the 1930s and 40s were employed as domestics, in addition to their writing and activism. Graciela Malvasio quotes Chabela Ramírez, a co-operative housing coordinator, to point to a continuing discourse that equates black femininity with domestic servitude:

*Chabela Ramírez…combina su tarea de coordinadora de la cooperativa de viviendas UFAMA con el trabajo de servicio doméstico. La dirigente explicó que a las mujeres negras lo que más se le estimuló siempre fue la vocación de servicio, “el ser buena, agradecida, leal y obediente a la patrona, al patrón, al marido, a los hijos, a todo el mundo.”*

(Chabela Ramírez…combines her job of coordinator for the UFAMA housing co-operatives with domestic work. This leader explained that black women were always encouraged to partake in domestic work, “To be good, grateful, loyal and obedient to her mistress, her master, her husband, to her kids, to the whole world.”)

(Malvasio, 2004)

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beautiful as an Italian virgin, lay down on the shore of the old lake, covered in white celajes, wrapped in a long white suit, white as snow, and covered in a wide-brimmed hat that was covered in pure, clean tulle.) (Castillo & Mené, 1996, p. 126).
Thus, even in the late 20th-century, domestic work is considered the “natural calling” for Afro-Uruguayan women.

This section looks at narratives from Afro-Uruguayan women, not all necessarily from the *conventillo*, but who all end up at some point in the domestic field. Their stories show how Afro-Uruguayan women are positioned as domestics and how they negotiate and resist this positioning. The following autobiographical reflections of Amanda, Marta Silva, and Martha Gularte indicate that the “experience of being a black woman” is shaped by the notion that they “naturally” belong in domestic service. Afro-Uruguayan women are seen to embody – and are compelled to embody – the domestic servant, both within and outside of the space of the *conventillo*.

These autobiographical narratives come from several sources. Amanda’s and Martha Gularte’s stories are found in *Historias de Exclusión: Afrodescendientes en el Uruguay* (139 pp.) edited by Teresa Porzecanski and Beatriz Santos (2006). This anthology features the autobiographical narratives of twelve Afro-Uruguayans. Most of the contributors are identified only by their first-name, but some are identifiable figures from the Afro-Uruguayan community. In the introduction, the editors explain how they have selected the stories:

> We have selected the “life histories” presented here on the basis of meaningful parameters that represent the trajectory of an ethnic minority, originally composed of different African cultures, and subjected to a forceful acculturation to a Western way of life. Taken together, they provide a panoramic gaze at some aspects of the Afro-Uruguayan community, which for the past two centuries has been deeply inserted into the history of this country.

(Porzecanski & Santos, 2006, p.8)

This book is considered to be the only work of its kind, tracking the experiences of diverse Afro-Uruguayans in their own voices (Frigerio, 2000).

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45 This is a second edition of the book and features more contributors than the first volume, published in 1994. The first edition was Porzecanski, T., & Santos, B. (Eds.). (1994). *Historias de vida: Negros en el Uruguay*. Montevideo, Uruguay: EPPAL.

46 The identifiable contributors include the Ruben Galloza (1926-2002), an artist who painted Afro-Uruguayan themes; Martha Gularte, a dancer (discussed below); Lagrima Rios (above); and Beatriz Santos, an actress, writer, activist, who is also one of my informants and one of the editors of the book.

47 Frigerio (2000, p. 94) says:

By introducing Afro-Uruguayans in their own voices, narrating their personal histories, and reflecting upon their culture, this book brings us a more realistic picture of what it means to be black in Uruguay. The numerous testimonies of everyday racism and the role of the black
Amanda was born in 1944 and grew up in a conventillo in Barrio Sur. Her entry into domestic work begins in childhood, coinciding with the experience of many Afro-Uruguayan women. Amanda’s parents separated when she was young and her mother sent her to a Catholic boarding school. Her tuition was covered by one of the school’s benefactors. At the school, Amanda remembers having to perform domestic labour in the laundry and the kitchen.

*En el colegio yo me sentí muy mal, porque, además, yo me sentía discriminada. Habíamos dos negras solamente. Yo fui a trabajar a los lavaderos y a la cocina, y me rebelaba mucho porque tenía muy pocas horas para estudiar.*

*Yo hacía muchas más horas en el lavadero y muchas más horas en la cocina que las otras. No era una forma de pago porque a mí me había puesto una persona que ayudaba en el colegio...*

(At school I felt very badly, because I felt discriminated against. There were only two of us who were black. I went to work in the laundry and the kitchen, and I rebelled a lot because I had few hours left for studying.)

I put in a lot more hours in the laundry and many more hours in the kitchen than the other girls. It wasn’t as a form of payment, because my tuition was covered by someone who helped out in the school....)

(Amanda in Porzecanski and Santos, 2006, p. 80)

Amanda was required to perform more labour than the other students and she relates it to her blackness. For Amanda, this was a racializing moment. As a child, this consolidated a sense of herself as less entitled than the other girls. She was compelled to perform labour, which as she points out, was not economically motivated. Later in life, Amanda reflects that she worked very hard so that her children would not have to do this type of work and she is proud of their professional achievements:

*Mi pensamiento fue, yo ya he lavado pisos y fregado pisos y he lavado ropa, y mis hijos no lo van a hacer. Tengo la suerte de una hija que trabaja en Primaria, mi hijo hizo hasta tercer año de Ayudante de Arquitecto, después fue jugador de fútbol, y ahora en este momento, está en los Estados Unidos. Y tengo una hija que es profesora de literatura. Y tengo seis nietos.*

Community associations in the struggle for equality, allow us to discern important aspects of the internal dynamics of the black community, as well as of relations within Uruguayan society.
(My thinking was...I have washed and scrubbed a lot of floors, washed laundry, and my children are not going to do this. I am fortunate to have a daughter who teaches in primary school, my son reached the third year of an Architect’s Assistant program; later he became a soccer player and now he is in the United States. I have a daughter who is a literature professor. I have six grandchildren.)

(Amanda in Porzecanski & Santos, 2006, p. 81)

Marta Silva, one of the informants I interviewed, is a woman in her sixties. She lived in Palermo from adolescence to young adulthood, during the 1950s. Today, Marta is retired. She takes piano lessons and is an active member of Mundo Afro. As a teenager, Marta’s mother died and she ended up going doing domestic work in a middle-class home in the neighbourhood. At night, Marta took classes at a local vocational college. Barrio Palermo is home to the Universidad de Trabajo del Uruguay (UTU). She eventually graduated as a tailor. During our interview, Marta recalled her employer’s strange reaction when she resigned from her cleaning job because she had graduated. This is how Marta remembers it:

Lloraba la señora, “Ay, no te vas, no te vas.” Dice, “Yo no voy a decir que tu te vas porque vas. Voy a decir que te vas porque te casasté.” Ah, ella no quería decir que yo había hecho el curso de sastrería en la UTU.

(The lady cried, “No, don’t go. You’re not going.” Then she said, “I’m not going to tell people why you are going. I’m going to tell them that you’re leaving because you got married.” She didn’t want to tell anyone that I had done the tailoring course at UTU.)

(Marta Silva, 2006, personal communication)

I asked Marta why her boss did not want others to know that her cleaning lady was leaving to work as a tailor. Marta replied,

Se ve que...no sé que le parecía a ella. Si decir que yo había....Porque además otra cosa. Decir que yo había aprendido un oficio, [I ask: ¿que quedaba mal?] Claro, ella no sé que le pasaba. Yo que sé. [Marta laughing]

Ella dice, “ay no yo no voy a decir que tu te vas.” Que se yo. Ella me decía Irenita, porque yo me llamo Marta Irene. Ella siempre me dice “Irenita.” “Ay, yo no voy a decir Irenita que te vas a trabajar en otra cosa. Voy a decir que te casaste.”

(It seems that...I don’t know what she thought. If telling people that I had...Because there is something else. To say that I had learned a trade...[When Martha hesitated, I asked, “Did this look bad?”]
Of course, I don’t know what was going on with her. I don’t know.
[Martha laughs]
She would say, “Oh no, I’m not telling anyone that you’re leaving.” She used to call me Irenita, because my name is Martha Irene. She would always call me “Irenita.”

“Oh no, I’m not going to say that Irenita went to work at something else. I’m going to tell them that you got married.”

(Marta Silva, 2006, personal communication)

Clearly the relationship between Marta and her employer cannot be reduced to a mere economic exchange. There is something else going on. Why does the employer have such an illogical reaction to Marta’s resigning? This episode suggests that the employer is negotiating her subjectivity in relation to “her” cleaning woman, echoing the findings in Radcliffe (1990) and Rubbo and Taussig (1983). The idea that Marta had graduated from a college and would be working in a certified trade was a blow to her employer. It seems to have disrupted this middle-class woman’s sense of how things should be. In getting a vocational diploma and quitting domestic work, Marta threatened her employer’s social order. Her black maid is leaving her to pursue a modest career in a better remunerated and more respected trade. She perhaps experiences a momentary crisis of identity, since she is losing Marta as her reference point. The employer attempts to maintain the hierarchical order by renaming what has happened and calling it marriage, an event that would not change Marta’s social status (in her eyes). It is also telling that Marta remembers her employer referring to her by a diminutive form of her middle name (Irenita), rather than the name by which she is known. In these acts of renaming, the employer is perhaps attempting to re-establish a power relation that is slipping away from her.

This episode is evocative of the role that the racialized domestic worker plays in defining white middle-class femininity. In this instance it is also apparent that the racialized domestic performs “work” that goes beyond the domestic chores. I repeat Rubbo and Taussig’s (1983, p. 6) insight that “female service embodies and molds something basic to all interpersonal relations of power.” For Marta’s employer, Marta embodied an inferior social standing, inextricable from her race, class, but also encoded
through her occupation.\(^{48}\) Here is further evidence that women who perform or embody domestic labour are key to constituting middle-class femininity. It is also evident that despite a restrictive positioning, people do not necessarily stay put and “that subjectivity is neither simply produced nor determined by its location within multiple, interrelated modalities of power, such that the subject experiences these relations in often surprising, and sometimes perverse, ways” (Pile, 1996, p. 237).

Martha Gularte (1919 – 2002) grew up in an orphanage in Montevideo after her mother died. Of very humble origins, Gularte once remarked, “Yo nací esclava, fui siriventita en casas de grandes familias, y cuando me vine para Montevideo no me liberé.” (I was born a slave. I was a little maid in the homes of great families, and when I came to Montevideo, I was not liberated.) (Belgranoweb, 2002). Originally from the rural interior of the country, Gularte later became a cabaret dancer. Today, she is best remembered as the dancer who instituted the role of the vedette in the 1940s carnival. Not as commonly known is the fact that Gularte was also an aspiring writer throughout her life and she published a book of verses prior to her death (Gularte, 1998). Although she never lived in the *conventillo*, her performance became emblematic of that space and its culture. In chapter five, I address Gularte’s importance as a vedette. Here, I want to focus on Gularte’s reflections on her childhood and adolescence at the orphanage. I want to emphasize how Gularte was positioned and how she repositioned herself.\(^{49}\) Gularte distinctly remembers how she was steered towards domestic work. As a child, she exhibited artistic, dancing, and writing abilities. For instance, when Juana de Ibarbourou (a major national poet and a benefactor of the orphanage) visited she was encouraged to show Ibarbourou her poetry (Porzecanski & Santos, 2006, p. 31). Gularte recalls,

\(^{48}\) Martínez-Alier identifies the links between occupation, social status and race in 19\(^{th}\) century Cuba. She holds that Cuba inherited from Spain rigid legislations that regulated which social ranks could occupy which types of *oficios*, “vocations.” (Martinez-Alier, 1989, p. 85). People’s jobs were so integral to identifying their social standing that there was great resistance to the loosening of these laws, because it would simultaneously erode the markers of race and class. To sum it up, “the presence of coloured people in the crafts and trades reinforced their [the occupation’s] inferiority in the eyes of the upper classes” (Martinez-Alier, 1989, p. 85).

\(^{49}\) Gularte’s reflections are published in two places, in a chapter in the aforementioned *Historias de Exclusión* (Porzecanski & Santos, 2006) and in the preface to her book, *El barquero del Río Jordán: Canto a la Biblia*. This latter is Gularte’s only published book of poetry and contains an extensive introduction (65 pp.) by Néstor G. Ganduglia and Cecilia Blezio (1998) based on interviews with Gularte.
however, that despite some recognition of her talents, she was shut out from many opportunities. The orphanage provided schooling, including vocational education for their older charges. The black girls were largely excluded from all but domestic training. Gularte was also deprived of ballet classes because ballet dancers “were not black”

*De allá, negra, ¡qué iba a aprender! Enseñaban gimnasia rítmica pero...ellos elegían. Las elegían rubias, blancas, todo. Después que vieron que yo tenía conocimiento de baile tampoco me convidaron. No me mandaban.*

(That black girl, what was she going to learn! They taught rhythmic gymnastics but...they chose the students. They chose the white, blonde girls, most of all. Finally, they saw that I had dancing knowledge, but they didn’t invite me. They didn’t send me to the lessons.)

(Gularte, 1998, p. 32)

Gularte did get her dancing “debut” when one of the leads, whom she poignantly remembers as a blonde Russian girl, became ill and was unable to dance. Gularte, who had memorized all the roles from the sidelines, stepped in. She performed impeccably and was lauded by the nuns and other girls for her performance. One of the nuns made sure to remark that, “*Pero no la vamos a vestir de rusa! Ruso negro no hay!*”

(We’re not going to dress her as a Russian girl! There aren’t any black Russians!)

(Gularte, 1998, p. 33).

Gularte also recalls that whenever someone would come looking for domestic help, she was the preferred choice. The clients wanted “black girls” (Porzecanski & Santos, 2006, p.31). “*Les encantaba ponernos uniforme a las negras*” (They loved putting maid uniforms on us, the black girls) (Porzecanski & Santos, 2006, p. 36). Gularte says she was crushed by these domestic experiences: “*Me quebraron el arte que yo traía, porque no era para haberme puesto de mucama.*” (They broke the artistry in me, because they shouldn’t have placed me as a servant.) (Porzecanski & Santos, 2006, p. 33).

Gularte, however, never stopped conceiving of herself as an artist. At the time of this account Gularte was 74 and she reflected on her career. She regretted the fact that her writing was stifled. She was only able to publish one book. But, she also celebrated the opportunities that dancing opened up for her. Gularte, as I have mentioned, went on to have a successful career as a cabaret dancer. Arguably, this is a space where the already sexualized black woman’s body is always welcome. Gularte, however, recuperates the storyline of the cabaret from degeneracy by narrating the cabaret dancer as an artist. She
traveled widely and met many interesting people. She was thus able to negotiate a meaningful position for herself, beyond those made available by the dominant narrative of black femininity. In her story she is an agent, who refuses men’s attention, refuses materiality and produces knowledge, her writing:

I never married in my life, I never married, and I never wanted to get married. I didn’t want to marry because having someone next to me bores me; it bores me. And today I feel like writing, just as you called I said, “stop, because I’m writing.”...Do you realize that I finished that book in 91? But you can’t just write when you want to, you have to feel it, and then you sit down to write...In this poem that I wrote two days ago, I can show you the scribbles, I have it set aside because I’m still writing it. I write it one way, then I break it down, then I write it another way.

(Gularte in Porzecanski and Santos, 1994, p. 29)

My positioning of Gularte’s account in this way is not meant to deny her claims to being an artist, rather it is to highlight the way that we are all producing ourselves, as we are being produced. I suggest that Gularte’s life narrative can be considered an act of “authority,” an attempt “to articulate meanings from within the collective discourses and beyond them” (Davies, 2000, p. 68). The type of authority described by Davies (2000, p. 66), is not about enforcing knowledge, but about mobilizing “existing discourse in new ways, inverting, inventing and breaking old patterns.” I am not trying to romanticize Gularte’s life story, which has been deeply marked by race, class and gender oppression. I am trying to offer a reading of her story that is not just about being an other to the dominant class, but to also think about her agency and desires. The dominant social order may have positioned Gularte as a maid and as a racialized sexpot (in her heyday, she was called a “Venus” and a “sex goddess”). But after reading Gularte’s story, it is her self-positioning as a writer that stands out. As Davies (2000, p. 67) suggests agency may be found in “the freedom to recognize multiple readings such that no discursive practice, or positioning within it by powerful others, can capture and control one’s identity.”

In reading Gularte’s story as an attempt to write herself against the grain of dominant discourses, I am trying to avoid a “wishful model of resistance to oppression” (Farnsworth-Alvear 1997: 73). But, I am not dismissing the importance of “seesaw[ing] between identifying constraints on female behavior and documenting women’s moments
of transgression” (Farnsworth-Alvey 1997: 73). I do read Marta’s story as an attempt to position herself beyond the clotheslines.

Conclusion: How the Conventillo Connects to Other Geographies

Muchos pisos lavó Benita,
muchas baldosas gastaron…
sus rodillas.

Muchas sábanas blanquearon
sus negras manos,
para que comiera Raúl.

(Benita scrubbed many floors,
many tiles wore down…
her knees.
Her black hands,
whitened many sheets,
so that Raúl could eat.)

(Francisco Guatimí in Britos, 1997, p. 74)

The colourful clotheslines and the “immoral” women who figure in songs and the popular imagination occlude the harshness of domestic service, emphasized by the poet Francisco Guatimí above. Folklorizing the clotheslines also glosses over the power relations that lead to “the embeddedness of domestic service in the racialization of certain groups” (Radcliffe, 1999c, p. 81). Not only do black, conventillo women become “natural” laundresses; this is an occupation that is not highly respected and encompasses less than full belonging. I want to end this chapter by thinking more deeply about what the conventillo laundress made possible through her labour. What else is generated through the clotheslines?

I have already suggested that the racialized domestic worker helps to define white middle-class femininity. Here I want to explore how the confinement of racialized women to domestic work may connect to other women’s geographies. As Phyllis Palmer shows, in the US the advancement of “women” in the mid-20th-century was made possible by the domestic labour of racialized women within their homes. Achieving a
relative “freedom” from the domestic sphere allowed women of a certain class to acquire educations, enter the formal work force, and make inroads into previously male domains. In Uruguay, Christine Ehrick (2005) documents that the early 20th-century advancement of Uruguayan women was due to the social policies of president José Batlle y Ordoñez (1856-1929). His Colorado government (1903-1907 and 1911-1915) made it a priority to educate women and facilitate their integration into the professions and the labour force by instituting incentives such as the eight-hour workday and maternity leave. At the time, Uruguay had a small population that was increasing primarily due to immigrants from the European working class. Ehrick holds that these measures were intended to educate the working-class women who were the potential reproducers of the nation. They needed to be educated since they did not fit the profile of ideal bourgeois femininity, but “within as little as one generation they could be or, more likely, their daughters could be, given a little help from the state to promote their health and well-being” (Townsend-Bell, 2007, p. 99). And there were indeed examples of eminent Uruguayan women (such as the Luisi sisters) who hailed from humble immigrant backgrounds and prospered thanks to Uruguay’s promotion of women’s education (Ehrick, 2005).

Ehrick recognizes that these policies were intended for “popular class” and immigrant women. Erica Townsend-Bell (2007) probes further. She holds that within the nation’s hierarchy, there was an ideal of the “popular class” women who were the intended reproducers of the nation. Given the Eurocentric national project, these women were envisioned as white. This placed white working-class women ahead of black women of the same class (though, as this chapter shows, these boundaries needed maintenance). Townsend-Bell points out that, implicitly, black women were neither envisioned as the beneficiaries of these programs, nor as the ideal reproducers. Prior to abolition, “If Creole women experienced life as something less than full citizens, many black women experienced it as something less than full people” (Townsend-Bell, 2007, p. 62). As I

50 The Colorado Party was consolidating its power at this time by pre-empting demands being made by unions and other social movements, making it more liberal than the liberals and creating one of the first “welfare states.” The avowedly secular party was also diminishing the influence of the Catholic church by passing divorce legislation and by encouraging women to work outside the home. This led to Uruguayan women’s early (compared to other nations) insertion into the formal work-force and the public sphere (Ehrick, 2005).

51 Among these four sisters, two became doctors, one a lawyer, and one a poet. The most famous, Paulina Luisi, became a national advocate for public health policies and a diplomat.
have already mentioned, these women were largely excluded from the formal labour force following official emancipation. Rather than mere exclusion, however, I think it is necessary to think about the extent to which Afro-Uruguayan women’s domestic labour may have supported the advancement of white women’s entry into industrial, administrative, and professional sectors. To what extent did the *conventillo* clotheslines permit the mobility of certain women into the public sphere? As Guy (2000) shows, domestic workers’ “transgressions” into bourgeois homes were viewed suspiciously by public health authorities, who feared contagion. There is no doubt, however, that others benefited from racialized women’s circuits between the *conventillos* and private homes. These women were working so their children could eat, and also perhaps so that other women – those who were viewed as “educable” and national reproducers – could advance.

In this chapter, I have argued that the folklorization of the *conventillo* clotheslines confines black femininity and occludes the hardship of domestic work. In turn, this occupation garners lesser respectability and therefore lesser belonging. The prominence of the clotheslines conflates blackness, *conventillo* women and domestic work so that women who are associated with the *conventillo* are “natural” maids and laundresses. It is not that this is the only type of work that black women do, but that this is how they are positioned and perceived. In fact, the last section shows how women resist their restrictive positioning. Three particular women referred to in this chapter epitomize what I call the tension of the clotheslines: the tension between folklorization and belonging. Rosa Luna, Lagríma Ríos and Martha Gularte were all Afro-Uruguayan women who achieved a high degree of success as entertainers. These women became a part of the fokloric story that is told about these neighbourhoods and Afro-Uruguayanness. In fact, the three were singled out as emblems of Afro-Uruguayan culture during the 2007 heritage celebrations. Yet, these women’s stories also reveal how their bodies were read with respect to domestic work. For example, Lagríma Ríos was asked to pose in front of Medio Mundo’s clotheslines for one of her album covers in the 1960s. When asked, Lagríma revealed that she did not have any connection to the place, other than the fact that she lived in the neighbourhood. She had no friends there and did not frequent the place. She also did not know why she was asked to pose there. What is compelling here is
the way that, even when these women are being celebrated, they are again tethered to the clotheslines.

To end, I want to reiterate that the folklorization of the clotheslines domesticates and feminizes the space of the conventillo. The next chapter explores how this feminization of a black space is linked to the production of white masculinity.
Chapter Four
“Through the Spear, the Shield, and the Dialect”:
The Fetish of the Conventillo

Introduction: The Conventillo as the Interior of Negritude

Cuando por primera vez, en Montevideo, entré por la arcada del conventillo Mediomundo, ignoraba que estaba iniciando un viaje al interior de la negritud. Un largo periplo que me llevaría hasta los sitios más perdidos y lejanos, a través de la lanza, el escudo y el dialecto….

Y así fue. El negro uruguayo me abrió generosamente sus brazos y su vida, ofrendándome con ternura la riqueza de su folklore, para que yo pudiera expresarme como artista.

(The first time I walked through the arches of the tenement Mediomundo, in Montevideo, I was oblivious to the fact that I was initiating a journey to the interior of negritude. A long journey would take me to the faraway, lost place, through the spear, the shield and the dialect….

And that’s how it happened. The Uruguayan black generously opened his arms and his life offering with tenderness the richness of his folklore, so that I could express myself as an artist.)

(Páez Vilaró, 2000, p. 7)

Carlos Páez Vilaró (hence Páez) is a renowned Uruguayan painter/sculptor, whose relationship to the conventillos and Barrio Sur dates back to the 1940s. Born in 1923 to a white, upper middle-class family and trained in graphic arts, the young artist was walking the city streets looking for inspiration when he “discovered” the conventillo Medio Mundo. Páez’s career was then launched through his paintings of Medio Mundo, its courtyard and its people. The description of Páez’s “journey into negritude” above comes from the autobiographical, Entre Colores y Tambores: Viaje desde la Punta de la Cerbatana, hasta la Lonja del Tamboril (hence Entre Colores), Páez’s meditation on how

52 Páez spells the conventillo’s name Mediomundo, rather than the more common Medio Mundo.
the “Uruguayan black” has contributed to his art. Páez’s evocative introduction echoes Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*; he describes a journey into darkness, this one located in central Montevideo.

In the last chapter I argued that, while providing opportunities for solidarity, women’s lives were largely confined through association with the *conventillo*. In contrast, in *Entre Colores*, we witness a subject who describes himself as enhanced and made complete through the *conventillo*, specifically its blackness. In this chapter, I enter the *conventillo* through *Entre Colores* to argue that this text evinces how white masculinity is negotiated in relation to this racialized space, as race interlocks with sexuality and gender. This text offers an interesting perspective because it is written by someone who has been profoundly connected to the *conventillo* and to its representation within the national and international spheres. *Entre Colores* is full of love and admiration for Afro-Uruguayans or “Uruguayan blacks,” in the author’s words. In the introduction he refers to the many contributions that this community has made to the nation:

> Me refiero a su intelectualidad, sus escritores, poetas, artistas y pintores; a su juventud y sus deportistas; a quienes la defienden y honran en todos los terrenos a la población anónima que impulsa con su trabajo la vida de nuestro país, a la fraterna familia del carnaval que mantiene en alto los estandartes del folklore afro-uruguayo y, por sobre todo, a nuestra mujer negra. Descendiente de aquellas nobles madres del ayer, amas de cría de nuestra orientalidad.

(I refer to its intellectuality, its writers, poets, artists, and painters; to its youth and athletes; who defend and honour in all fields that anonymous population that propels the life of our country with its work, to the brotherly family of carnival that maintains the high standards of Afro-Uruguayan folklore and, most of all, to our black woman. She is the descendant of the noble mothers of yesteryear, the wet nurses of our orientalidad.)

(Páez Vilaró, 2000, p. 9)

What is compelling about this work is that, alongside the efforts to show the author’s insertion into Afro-Uruguayan culture, there is an ongoing preoccupation with marking racial difference in ways that connect blackness to particular spaces and that speak through gender, sexuality, music, and the body. Above, for instance, his invocation of black intellectuality is followed immediately by an essentializing image of black

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53 The word orientalidad refers to the nation’s full name República Oriental del Uruguay, which is due to its location east of the Uruguay River. Orientalidad connotes the nation’s “pastoral” origins.
women as wet nurses. In chapter one, I drew on geography and psychoanalysis to argue that the production of spatial boundaries – boundaries between the self and the Other – are inherent to the process of subjectivity. While Freudian theory focuses on how the child apprehends boundaries between the self and mother, theorists have expanded this concept to argue that the formation of a dominant subjectivity requires forming boundaries between the self and the racialized/gendered other (Kirby, 1996; Pile, 1996; Razack, 1998). Race is a geographic process that requires marking boundaries around spaces and bodies. My reading of Entre Colores makes visible how the “delimitation of an external environment” that produces the self occurs within “the cultural and historical process that went into shaping the individual” (Kirby, 1996, p. 46). Specifically, I argue that Entre Colores exemplifies how the boundaries of white masculinity are negotiated through the fetish of blackness. Here I am drawing on Anthony Paul Farley’s (1997) thesis that the “black body as fetish object” produces the “pleasure of whiteness.” For Farley, whiteness is pleasure in one’s superiority achieved through the objectification and humiliation of the other. In this chapter, I foreground how this pleasure is experienced corporeally and geographically. In Entre Colores, white pleasure comes about through an encounter with blackness that is fully embodied. During the “journey to whiteness,” the subject partakes in many sensual pleasures and practices such as observing black dancers, strolling into racialized spaces, and joining in Afro-Uruguayan drumming processions. While some theorists have cogently argued that Western discourse constitutes whiteness as disembodied, and therefore rational (for example Mohanram, 1999), not as much attention has been paid to the ways that whiteness is lived as an embodied identity. This is particularly true of Latin American studies, where far more research has been done on the “whitening” of multiracial populations (Graham, 1990; Radcliffe & Westwood, 1996; Skidmore, 1990; Stutzman, 1981; Wade, 1997; and others). As Wade (2006, p. 119) notes, the construction of whiteness “as a self-identity and lived reality in Latin American countries” has not been widely studied. This chapter begins to address this gap and to suggest ways of theorizing Latin American whiteness in relation to space.

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54 Exceptions include Minnie Bruce Pratt’s (M. B. Pratt, 1984) close attention to how she embodies whiteness as she walks through a neighbourhood in Washington. She documents her own actions and reactions to people as she moves through differently racialized geographies.
The main argument of this chapter is that the paintings and the writings reveal a desire for and disavowal of the desire for blackness. The subject reveals a fear of engulfment, the fear of merging with the Other, the fear of merging with blackness. This anxiety is accompanied by reinstating difference. The subject fetishizes the *conventillo* by objectifying the people, by portraying a primitive people who are essentially connected to sexuality, music, and the body. What is being disavowed by the fetish of the *conventillo* is the fiction or ambiguity of race/class boundaries. Blackness and black space are fixed and this in turn constitutes whiteness. Thus the folklorization of the *conventillo* needs to be understood as implicit in the process of fetishization and the disavowal of blackness.

The organization of the chapter is as follows. I begin by describing the primary text that I am analyzing, *Entre Colores* and I explain its relevance for thinking about racial subjectivity in Uruguay. I then contextualize this “journey into negritude” by looking at literature on other journeys into blackness by white, masculine subjects (Andrews, 2007b; Lott, 1995; Seigel, 2000). I follow with my analysis of *Entre Colores*, arguing that this text reveals a subject who negotiates white masculinity by “mapping” racial boundaries through the fetish of black bodies and spaces. Finally, I discuss the implications of this study for thinking about the *conventillo* as a representational space within the national context.

**Entre Colores**

I focus on *Entre Colores y Tambores: Viaje desde la Punta de la Cerbatana, hasta la Lonja del Tamboril* because it is Páez’s meditation on the impact of Afro-Uruguayan people and culture on his art. Specifically, it recounts Vilaró’s relationship to the people of Barrio Sur. The book (239 pp.) is dedicated to “the Black Race in Uruguay” (Vilaró, 2000, p. 9). It has an interesting organization. The first half sketches out a rough Afro-Uruguayan history from slavery to present; the second half recounts the author’s relationship to Afro-Uruguayans. After “discovering” Medio Mundo, the building and its residents became the subject of Páez’s paintings leading to his first exhibitions and artistic renown. He also befriended local musicians, took up the drums, and became a member of the *comparsa* (drumming group) Morenada. The residents even provided a room for Páez’s art supplies in the tenement. Páez’s career took off and he is one of the
most successful living Uruguayan artists. Today Páez’s paintings greet newcomers at Montevideo’s international airport and his architectural creation Casapueblo adorns a beautiful point on the country’s eastern coast, Punta Ballena.

Through his art, performance, and writing, Páez transmits images of blackness to Uruguayans who have never set foot inside a conventillo. Aside from Entre Colores, Páez has published his thoughts on Medio Mundo in books such as Así te veo Montevideo (1983), I Miss you Mediomundo (1980), and Arte y Parte (1999), where many of the same themes and sentiments are expressed. He also exhibited his works in Medio Mundo itself during a UNESCO conference (1958) and took candombe to the posh resort of Punta del Este during an international film festival in 1950, something that was unheard of at the time. His paintings of Barrio Sur and its people have had world-wide circulation. Páez’s style provides an iconography of Afro-Uruguayanness that continues to influence representations in items such as souvenirs, t-shirts, and posters. His work was influenced by an earlier Uruguayan painter, the Italian-born Pedro Figari (1861-1938), who painted his childhood memories of black life in Montevideo. Páez (1999, p. 59) points out that he has an “advantage” over the older painter: “Figari pintó los negros basándose en sus recuerdos, yo en cambio los pinto desde el propio escenario de su realidad, compartiendo su vida diaria.” (Figari painted blacks based on his memories, whereas I paint them from the stage of their own reality by sharing their daily life) (Páez Vilaró, 1999, p. 59). His paintings of Medio Mundo also draw on modern art traditions, which have their own relationship to blackness (H. Foster, 1985; Wade, 2000).

Entre Colores reproduces many of the traditional stereotypes associated with blackness including associating black people with music, sexuality, and primitive culture. In his essay “The Other question,” Homi Bhabha (1994) encourages us to move beyond a simple rejection of the stereotype and towards an investigation of what the stereotype does. What does it facilitate? What types of subjectivities does the stereotype allow for or produce? I am concerned with what blackness and black space signify, how it is both produced and productive. What does the folkorization/fetishization of the conventillo’s

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55 There are varying opinions on Páez and his relationship to Barrio Sur, but there are many who undoubtedly consider him to be an ally of Afro-Uruguayans. For instance one of my informants, who lived in Medio Mundo (Cachila) considers him a “friend of the family.” Another informant (Néstor Silva) felt that “Vilaró promoted Medio Mundo in order to promote himself.” My argument does not support nor dispute either of these claims. It is also not reliant upon them.
blackness enable? I am interested in the “processes of subjectification made possible” through blackness (Bhabha, 1994, p. 95).

Páez characterizes his encounter with Medio Mundo as a “journey into negritude.” The next section connects Vilaro’s journey to that of other subjects who seemingly transgress class and racial boundaries.

**Other Journeys into Blackness**

Páez’s journey into blackness has historical antecedents. Eric Lott (1995) studies the minstrel show in the US. Following abolition, working-class white men in blackface parodied black men for entertainment and profit. For Lott, the thrill and depth of this phenomenon showed that “dominant codes of masculinity in the United States was (and still is) partly negotiated through an imaginary black interlocutor” (1995, p. 53). Lott indicates that the relationship between racialized practices and whiteness is not straightforward. He asserts that the minstrel show cannot be theorized either as “wholly authentic or wholly hegemonic” because such a reduction obscures “the complexities of white subject formation and subjectivity, and of the multiple determinations that make race such a complex lived social reality” (Lott, 1995, p. 35). Lott keenly identifies that underlying the minstrel show’s popularity was the latent desire for what was officially or “popularly” disdained, blackness. Again, we see that “what is excluded at the overt level of identity-formation is productive of new objects of desire” (Stallybrass and White, 1986, p. 25).

Uruguay has its own history of blackface. Groups of painted white men started appearing in Carnival in the 1860s. They played “African” music and called themselves *Lubolos* after a made-up African nation.\(^56\) Indeed, according to several sources, it was only after these groups became popular that Afro-Uruguayans felt comfortable enough to perform *candombe* in carnival (Andrews, 2007b; Tomás Olivera Chirimini, 2001). Prior to this, the Afro-Uruguayan carnival *comparsas* were called philharmonics and performed European musical styles. There is little research on the *lubolos*. George Reid Andrews (2007) looks at the historical roots of Uruguay’s blackface performers. Citing a

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\(^56\) Ironically, Afro-Uruguayan *comparsas* soon began to refer to themselves as *Negros y Lubolos*, and *Lubolo* became synonymous with black. Perhaps another instance of a slippage between blackness and its “counterfeit” (Lott, 1995).
lack of historical evidence for the performers’ motivations, Andrews draws on Lott. From lyrics and newspaper reports, he infers that these performers – much like the US minstrels – both mocked and admired black culture. For Andrews, the blackface performers were negotiating anxieties about race and class, as well as transcending them. And, like their northern counterparts, the lubolo comparsas constructed a limited view of blackness with their lyrics: “Hot-blooded black women, hot rhythms, and African sensuality came together to define a vision of blackness that has been thoroughly absorbed into Uruguayan national and popular culture” (Andrews, 2007b, p. 725).

Micol Seigel offers a nuanced analysis of similar performers in Buenos Aires. Seigel studies the cocoliche, a comic figure performed by Italian working class immigrants in the Buenos Aires carnival. This clown-like character emerged in the early 1900s. The cocoliche mocked the gaucho, a figure that then symbolized the criollo (Creole) nation in opposition to gringos (foreigners such as the performers themselves). The cocoliches also dressed in drag and made fun of Afro-Argentine cultural practices. According to Seigel, the cocoliches at once disrupted the national hegemony and reinforced it. They ridiculed the criollo ideal, but participated in a national racial hierarchy as a way of whitening themselves. For Seigel, the performance of blackness by the cocoliche was a way of distancing themselves from a group that was deeply oppressed. These working-class immigrants were not considered “national” material; “by the 1910s Italians were associated with racial degeneration and poverty and were widely villified” (Seigel, 2000, p. 66). Seigel (2000, p. 58) holds that these insights are still “relevant” because “their performances and the limits they encountered set the perimeters for the ‘whiteness’ at the core of the racist, misogynist nationalism whose legacy would stamp Argentine politics and history throughout the 20th-century.”

Lott, Andrews, and Seigel all focus on transgressions into blackness by white working-class actors. Many of the “transgressors” were marginalized immigrants, who sought to fit within the nation. They sought to distinguish themselves from racialized groups in situations where race and class were intertwined, but not identical. Both Seigel and Andrews also raise the possibility that cross-racial identifications, rather than sheer denigration, may have characterized some performances of blackness.
In Buenos Aires, the mostly working-class immigrants who populated La Boca related to Blacks as neighbors, for many Afro-Argentines also lived in this malaria-infested, flood-threatened, peripheral neighborhood (Andrews 1980; Natale 1984). Perhaps carnival blackface provided opportunities for expressions of immigrant Afro-Argentine solidarity, or perhaps the performer identified themselves as Afro-Argentine (exceedingly difficult to glean from the historical record), and intended their performance to express racial identity.

(Seigel, 2000, p. 70)

Seigel concludes, however, that the overall effect of the cocoliche was to secure a place for the new immigrants by participating in the displacement of racialized Argentines:

Despite their slippery disobedience, the arguments cocoliches advanced had been complicit in reproducing the racist, misogynist nationalism that had inspired the parody in the first place (by denigrating immigrants). Cocoliche’s performance simply moved one group- European, and particularly Italian immigrants – from the margins to the core of the nation’s collective self-imaginaition. It also provided a medium for the transmission of that destructive ideology to the hearts and minds of lower – and working-class Argentines.

(Seigel, 2000, p. 75)

In tracing the previous history, I am not equating Vilaró’s book or actions with blackface performance. Páez does not mock Afro-Uruguayan culture. Moreover, he has no reason to feel the anxiety of the working-class man or the recent immigrant. Lott and Seigel do, however, provide insights regarding the negotiation of white masculinity through the performance of blackness. Wade’s (2000; 2001) research on Colombia is useful to this discussion because it points to how elites are also invested in blackness. Wade investigates how música tropical, a musical genre that was originally associated with the Caribbean coast and blackness, became identified as a national music. Initially, the music was viewed as crude and vulgar. Music from the whitened highlands was privileged as a signifier of proper Colombianness. Over time, however, music from the coast became perceived as modern and exciting. Wade underscores that this was due to the multiple significations carried through blackness. Blackness, as previously described, can connote primitiveness, coarseness, and wanton sexuality. Blackness is also, however, positively associated with modernity through its connection to modernism, an art movement that drew on the “primitive” aesthetics of African, Asian, and indigenous cultures (Wade, 2000, p. 128). Wade indicates that the adoption of black musical styles by Colombian elites was implicated in negotiating a dominant, modern identity. Through
complex significations, “a hint of blackness” could bestow modernity upon elite Colombians (Wade, 2001, p. 860). The music (itself the result of transnational influences) began to be promoted as a marker of national identity. Wade finds that in the national adoption of a black music, Colombia “retained a hierarchy of blackness and whiteness and continued to reflect nationalism’s Janus-faced couplet of tradition and modernity” (Wade, 2001, p. 860).

The studies reviewed in this section reveal a complex history of white “appropriations” of blackness that form a backdrop for my discussion. The next section discusses some of the ways that I am reading for blackness within the text and elaborates on the connections between primitivism and modern art.

Interpreting Blackness in the text and Primitivism in Modern Art

Toni Morrison (1992) provides useful strategies for analyzing blackness in the text, developed through her exploration of the “Africanist presence” in US literature. Her examination begins with the assumption that if there is a black figure in the narrative, it must be doing something. Morrison uses the term “Africanist” to describe “the denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people” (Morrison, 1992, pp. 6-7). Morrison finds that the significations of blackness are many including dread, fear, and longing. Significantly, the construction of blackness is inextricable from the construction of white subjectivity.

As a result of her investigation, Morrison makes a list of cues to watch for, textual devices that alert us that a racial shorthand is standing in for something more profound, perhaps something that is not consciously known. These strategies include the discursive distancing of the self from the Other; the bestialization of the racialized figure; and the utilization of a “dehistoricizing allegory” that places the racialized Other in a storyline that makes their whole existence anachronistic (Morrison, 1992, pp. 67-69). As well, Morrison draws attention to the fetishization of the black body, which fixes it as the site of eroticism.
Because Páez is a visual artist, I also want to provide some background on the connections between primitivism and modern art. As an artist, Páez (1999) refuses to classify himself within any one genre, but he admits being influenced by Picasso and some of his work is obviously indebted to modern primitivism (see figure 7). In addition, his writing valorizes the “primitive” in Afro-Uruguayans. Hal Foster’s (1985) critique of a retrospective on modernism at New York’s Museum of Modern Art in 1984 provides useful insights. 57 This exhibit explained the primitive turn in the early 20th-century as a reflection of artists’ affinity for the “universal” aesthetics expressed in the abstract forms of “primitive” cultures. Foster (1985, p. 56) argues that these artists also mobilized “primitive” aesthetics for their countercultural potential. Artists who dared to “go primitive” were positioned as transgressors. For instance the MOMA exhibit celebrates the risks taken by Picasso and Gauguin. In some cases, primitive art is seen as merely confirming the revolutionary vision of these artists. One critic argues that Picasso’s exposure to African artifacts “sanction[ed] his even more radical progress along a path he was already breaking” (Robert Goldwater as cited in Foster, 1985, p. 56). Foster finds that such conventional art history explanations for primitivism fall short because they do not acknowledge that, beyond formalist concerns, artists mobilized primitive aesthetics because of what they signified within Western consciousness and the unconscious:

Generally perceived as primal and exotic, the primitive posed a double threat to the logocentric West, the threat of otherness and relativism. It also posed a doubly different artifact, more "immediate," more "magical." We know how the early moderns reclaimed this artifact as art, abstracted it into form;

(H. Foster, 1985 pp. 56-57)

Foster bolsters his argument by looking at Picasso’s painting, Les Demoiselles d’Avignon (1907). This work, featured at the MOMA exhibit, portrays prostitutes whose heads are painted as African masks. Foster turns to Picasso’s own conception of the painting: “I understood what the Negroes used their sculptures for... All fetishes ... were weapons” (Picasso as cited in Foster, 1985, p. 3). Picasso mobilized a “Negro” aesthetic for its menacing potential. Thus Foster (1985, p. 3) argues, “If, in the Demoiselles, Picasso transgresses, he does so in order to mediate the primitive in the name of the West (and it

57 The exhibition was called “Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern” and was curated by William Rubin.
is in part for this that he remains the hero of MOMA’s narrative of the triumph of modern
art).” Critically then, the artist who draws upon primitivism/blackness is celebrated for
transgressing Western conventions, but may also be complicit in “unconsciously”
reinforcing hegemonic fears of the Other. I return to this idea when I discuss some of
Páez’s paintings.

Racialized Geographies in Entre Colores

Freud proposed that the structure of the self is achieved through the delimitation
of an external environment, and thereby suggested that the form for the
environment that the self produces will recursively dictate the shape of the self.
The symbiotic shaping of environment and self that Freud observed might occur
not only in the psychological developmental process that goes to form an
individual, but in the cultural and historical process that went into shaping the
individual, and any other form that subjectivity has historically taken.

(Kirby, 1996, p. 46)

I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by
tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetichism, racial defects, slave-
ships, and above all else, above all: ‘Sho’good eatin.’

(Fanon, 1967, p. 112)

Entre Colores reveals a subject who comes to know himself through his
positioning in pre-existing racial geographies, attempts to transcend them, and
simultaneously participates in maintaining them. The author endeavours to show his
closeness to Afro-Uruguayans, yet he also constitutes boundaries between himself and
blackness. I would argue that this is evident from the first paragraph (already quoted in
the epigraph) where the subject is actively delimiting blackness:

The first time I walked through the arches of the tenement of Mediomundo, in
Montevideo, I was oblivious to the fact that I was initiating a journey to the
interior of negritude. A long journey would take me to the faraway, lost place,
through the spear, the shield and the dialect…. And that’s how it happened.
The Uruguayan black generously opened his arms and his life offering with
tenderness the richness of his folklore, so that I could express myself as an
artist.

(Páez Vilaró, 2000, p. 7)

This passage interpellates the reader into a world that evokes mystery, “tom-toms” and
the Heart of Darkness. Medio Mundo, a building located near the capital’s center,
quickly gives way to an atavistic space that is “faraway, lost,” and primitive. Here I am
reminded of Mohanram’s (1999) contention that blackness is rendered static and
primitive in contrast to the modernity of whiteness. The author is entering a foreign, perhaps forbidden and foreboding space, but he is greeted with open arms. The space is feminized: It is mysterious, enticing, and penetrable. The latter is not a mere metaphor because the subject literally enters through the opening, “the arches,” of the conventillo and it sets up a power relationship between the subject and the residents. As I will show, the artist’s interactions with the space produce him as the explorer and cartographer of the territory and its residents as the “mass.” The mapping is present already in the above description. The interior implies an exterior, which produces a boundary. The author “walk[s] through the arches of the tenement of Mediomundo” passing the threshold into “the interior of negritude.” If the interior of Medio Mundo marks blackness, what does the exterior mark? The author does not explicitly tell us, but my examination shows that the boundary being produced through Medio Mundo is that between blackness and whiteness. Here, I am drawing on Mohanram (1999) who argues that the marking of the black body or space unmarks whiteness; it makes whiteness the universal category. It also unmarks the power relations that constitute difference: “What the unmarked body manages to occlude by this double move is the fact that notions of marked and unmarked, embodied and disembodied, are all social relationships of domination and exploitation” (Mohanram, 1999, p. 39).

The reference to “negritude” in this initial passage could be ambiguous. It could gesture to Aimé Césaire’s and Léopold Senghor’s pan-Africanist thought, with which Páez is familiar. The adjoining mention of “the spear, the shield and the dialect” disrupts this interpretation by calling up savagery. The title of the book Entre Colores y Tambores: Viaje desde la Punta de la Cerbatana, hasta la Lonja del Tamboril, (Between Colors and Drums: Journey from the End of the Blowpipe to the Skin of the Small Drum) is also evocative of a primitive locale. It is true that the negritude movement did draw upon essentialist symbols to promote pan-African pride. Reading through Entre Colores, however, reveals that blackness is admired primarily for musicality, sensuousness, and mystery, qualities that have the potential to slide into primitiveness, volatility, and danger, particularly when black bodies transgress into white spaces.

58 Páez Vilaró (2000, p. 8) mentions Senghor and Cesaire in his introduction.
This slippage is evident in a later chapter, when Páez vividly recalls the opening of his first exhibition of paintings in February of 1950. This event took place during an international film festival in Punta del Este, the country’s most exclusive beach-side resort. To honour the people who had inspired his paintings, Páez (2000, p. 161) arranged a gig for the drummers of Medio Mundo, seizing “the opportunity to show the strength of black Uruguayan folklore before the international delegations.” The comparsa prepared, creating new costumes and rehearsing steadily for the show. The writer recalls that the show was a huge success. He explains that the country club owners had been nervous since “they were used to dealing with different type of artist” (162). There was a big contrast between the “elegant” apparel of the audience and the “luxurious rusticity” of the candomberos (163). This is a description of the show:

Una atmósfera de África transformó el lugar cuando las lenguas de fuego alcanzaron los pinos y los tambores quebraron el silencio. Las bailarinas se apoderaron del aplauso, haciendo de cada mesa una tarima personal para el despliegue de sus movimientos sensuales. Las copas y botellas se derramaron, los platos y cubiertos cayeron al piso, pero nadie se molestó. Todos estaban contagiados por aquel ritmo feroz y misterioso que, generado por los brazos invisibles, dominaba la fiesta desde la oscuridad.

(When the flames licked the pine trees, an African atmosphere transformed the place and the drums broke the silence. The dancers ensnared the applause, turning each table into a personal platform to display their sensual movements. The glasses and bottles spilled, the dishes and cutlery fell to the floor, but no one was bothered. Everyone was infected by that ferocious and mysterious rhythm which, generated by invisible arms, dominated the party from the darkness.)

(Páez Vilaró, 2000, pp. 163-164)

The music got the “tuxes” and “furs” mingling with the “moth-eaten etiquette of the Benguela medicine man” and the “voluptuousness” of the comparsa dancers (Páez Vilaró, 2000, p. 164). Páez (164) remarks that this was a magical moment when “negros y blancos, pobres y ricos, jóvenes y viejos, convertidos en una nube de felicidad, se habían abrazado, hermanados, participando en un candombe mágico que abarcaba todos los matices” (blacks and whites, poor and rich, young and old, were converted into a cloud of happiness; they embraced fraternally, participating in a magical candombe, which spanned all the shades). While the author heaps praise upon the dancers and drummers, the passage also marks who embodies the “high” and “not-high,” through
their attire and, more importantly, through their behaviour. Here, I am drawing on Pile’s observation that:

Maps of meaning, identity and power are charted by identifying what is high and not-high and by establishing differences between the high and the low, which are defended by keeping the low- Others at a distance. However, the identification and defence of high/low boundaries can only be achieved through constant vigilance: the powerful are constantly looking with desire and disgust, with fascination, at things which are considered outside their selves.

(Pile, 1996, p. 176)

The author valorizes the “not-high,” the black performers who imbue beauty, sensuality, and mystery into the evening. Reading more closely, however, we can see that embodying these qualities can also provoke chaos. The sensuality and joy of the comparsa is “infectious” and leads to rowdiness. Black bodies are responsible for bringing disorder to Punta del Este. People are dancing on tables, bottles are spilled, and plates are smashed, all in good fun. According to the author, the convergence of blackness and whiteness produces an ecstatic moment. Soon, however, the magic ends. Following the show, the club owners refuse to pay the drummers. Their protocol demands that they receive an invoice following the event. The musicians were all leaving for Montevideo that night and could not afford to return. Páez recalls that this injustice almost caused a riot:

Un grito proveniente del sector de los lubolos alumbró la oscuridad en el centro de las chispas. Fue una voz ronca, como de mando tribal. Si en Kenya los masais habían hecho una guerra motivada por que una de sus vacas cruzó a territorio ajeno, aquí la mecha empezó a encenderse por una causa parecida.

(A shout emanated from the side of the lubolos [blacks] and it lit up the darkness in the midst of sparks. It was a hoarse voice like a tribal command. If in Kenya the Masai had gone to war because one of their cows crossed to a foreign territory, here the spark began to burn due to a similar cause.)

(Páez Vilaró, 2000, p. 165)

The author sided with the drummers, arguing that they had a legitimate claim. He did not want their pay delayed by a “mere formality.” He approached the authorities and ultimately they were paid. In the end, Páez (2000, p. 165) felt that the authorities had “read the message carried by the expressions of the lubolos [blacks] and the pay appeared almost immediately, as if by magic, skipping the presence of invoices.” Faced with the irrationality and “war-like” fury of blackness, they relent. Whiteness and blackness had
merged, but at the end of the day, blackness reverts to an anachronistic Africa, which is as sensuous as it is potentially dangerous. The author maps the limits of “rationality” and “universaliry.”

There is nothing new in equating blackness with the primitive and describing the “primitive” as “a site of originary unity, symbolic plenitude, natural vitality,” a convention since the Enlightenment (H. Foster, 1985, p. 59). I want to further discuss, however, the central ambivalence revealed by this anecdote, the tension between the approach and retreat from blackness. The author strives to show his connection to the conventillo folks, yet he also distances himself by forging an essential connection between black bodies, music, and an atavistic space. In the next section, I explore how this process involves a fetishization. More than a distancing device, I discuss how fetishization is constitutive of the boundaries required by white masculinity.

The Fetish of Blackness in Entre Colores

I came into the world, imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects.

(Fanon, 1967, p. 109)

In this section, I want to explore how the fetish of blackness produces the white, masculine subject in Entre Colores. Here I am using the word fetishization as it is invoked by Farley (1997). Farley is building on Fanon (1967). While Fanon focuses on how the black subject is objectified and fragmented through the white gaze, Farley looks more closely at what the fetishization of the black body does for the dominant subject. He defines fetishization as the fixing of a certain quality, meaning, or essence upon an object or body.59 For the subject who can define himself by fetishizing another, the experience is powerful and produces the pleasure of whiteness:

Race is the pre-eminent pleasure of our time. Whiteness is not a color; it is a way of feeling pleasure in and about one’s body. The black body is needed to fulfill this desire for race-pleasure. In our colorlined world, the white body is a form of desire and the black body is a form of pleasure.

59 For a discussion of how the fetish of blackness is connected to Marx’s commodity fetishism see Farley (2005).
Farley shows how race is not only repressive (exclusionary), but it is also productive, in the Foucauldian sense. It produces pleasure and humiliation. Farley theorizes that fetishization and pleasure are bound to ongoing race relations. He describes the symbolic, psychic, and material embeddedness of race in our lives through W.E.B. Du Bois’s (2003 [1903]) colorline. The colorline is a boundary we carry around with us. Subjects are produced through and reproduce the colorline. Farley maintains that the colorline is constituted and maintained at the subjective level by fetishizing the black body. Objectifying the black body produces the pleasure of whiteness. So far, in Entre Colores, we see that the white masculine subject derives pleasure from what he delimits as blackness. He describes several key moments – the entrance into the conventillo, the dance in Punta del Este – where he undergoes magical, almost transformative, experiences. In Entre Colores, however, even the mundane details of Afro-Uruguayan life offer pleasure. This is how Páez Vilaró (2000) describes the central courtyard of the conventillo.

Las abuelas negras, encorvadas sobre los piletones, hundían sus brazos en la espuma mientras otras más jóvenes se ocupaban del tendal; un montón de negritos jugaba a la rayuela en el cemento; varios perros y gatos ensayaban diferentes posiciones despulándose al sol, y en jaulas y tramperos, canarios y mixtos decoraban las paredes.

(The black grandmothers, hunched over the large sinks, sand their arms in the foam while other younger women took care of hanging up the laundry; a pile of black children playing hopscotch on the pavement; several dogs and cats rehearsed different positions, removing fleas in the sun, and in the cages the canaries and other birds decorated the walls.)

(Páez Vilaró, 2000, p. 7)

The conventillo women discussed in the last chapter are here reduced to hunched figures. There is a quick slippage from the descriptions of black women and “a pile of black children” to “dogs,” “cats,” and “birds,” perhaps a “metaphysical condensation,

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60 The colorline is a concept that is derived from the US context. I am aware of the limitations of trying to read the specificities of one locale through a theoretical lens developed in another, a move that has been forcefully critiqued (Silva, 1998). Rather than transposing or imposing theory, however, I turn to Farley’s insights because they resonate with what is happening in Entre Colores. I am ascertaining the extent to which a boundary around blackness and whiteness is produced in, and produces, the text. To do this I analyze how the black figure and black spaces are constituted in Vilaró (2000).
collapsing persons into animals prevent[ing] human contact and exchange” (Morrison, 1992, p. 67). The labouring laundresses and playing children quickly become a tableau, a part of the landscape, metonymic with blackness. Farley argues that whiteness is experienced by fetishizing blackness repeatedly:

The image of the black is ubiquitous. Whites return and return and return again to this fetish in order to satisfy a self-created urge to be white. The satisfaction of this will-to-whiteness is a form of pleasure in and about one’s body. It is a pleasure which is satisfied through the production, circulation, and consumption of images of the not-white.

(Farley, 1997, p. 463)

Whiteness requires constant representations of the fetish object that constitutes it. It requires that “visions of black subalterns dance through our dreams, our literature, our arts, our sciences, and our films” (Farley, 1997). The image of the essentialized “not-white” is recurrent throughout Entre Colores, where there is a constant conflation between “the African,” “the black,” and the “Uruguayan black.”

As an extension of the journey, the writer followed up his city travels with a trans-Atlantic crossing. Once he had “exhausted” the theme of Medio Mundo, he traveled to Africa in the 1960s to uncover the roots of “the Uruguayan black” (Páez Vilaró, 2000, p. 7).

The following is a description of the “black woman” dancing, a “dancing subaltern that stands in for Afro-Uruguayans and Africans:

Cuando la negra baila, toda ella se electriza. Un cosquilleo la invade, como si la marabunta corriera por sus venas. Está recibiendo el mandato de sus ancestros, no puede desobeder la orden secreta de sus genes.

Es por ello que cuando da rienda suelta a su cuerpo y sus piernas y caderas dibujan un sensual atrevimiento, la danza se enriquece y transmite una seducción instantánea a los tocadores, que acentúan y enfurecen su ritmo, estimulados por el magnetismo de sus formas.

(When the black woman dances, her whole being is electrified. A tickling sensation invades her, as if the marbunta ran through her veins. She is receiving the mandate from her ancestors; she can’t disobey the secret order of her genes.

So when she lets her body go, her legs and her hips draw a sensual boldness, the dance becomes richer and there is an instant seduction of the drummers,

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61 Reference to the “Uruguayan black” throughout the book is also telling. It emphasizes that Afro-Uruguayans are considered to be “black” first, tacitly distancing them from the nation.
whose rhythm becomes accentuated and more furious, as they are stimulated by the magnetism of their forms.

(Páez Vilaró, 2000, p. 111)

The black feminine figure drawn by Páez is carnivalesque. As defined by Mikhail Bakhtin (1968), the carnivalesque body is fully corporeal, open, and out of control. “The lower parts” rule over the upper body (Bakhtin, 1968, p. 19). Morrison and Farley lead me to a set of questions about the above passage. I wonder about the excessive sensuality and sexuality that is attributed to the dancer and the drummers. I wonder about how the “Africanist character is used to….explore and penetrate one’s own body in the guise of the sexuality, vulnerability, and anarchy of the other” (Morrison, 1992, p. 52-53). If “the subject of the dream is the dreamer,” to what extent is the “instant seduction” of the drummers a projection of the subject’s own desires (Morrison, 1992, p. 17)? Sadiya Hartman (1997, p. 25) notes that “fantasies about the other’s enjoyment are ways for us to organize our own enjoyment.” Thus, I wonder to what degree the subject’s desire to observe the racialized body dancing is connected to the desire to experience himself as white. Gender speaks through race and race through gender in the powerful image of the dancer. To what extent does the contact with a hypersexual femininity – kept at bay via the textual boundary of the writer as observer – establish and enhance the subject’s white masculinity?

Fetishization implies a disavowal. In Freudian theory, fetishization is a sign that the oedipal phase has not been fully resolved. The fetish signifies a displacement of desire. Because the mother’s “lack” is traumatic, the child displaces this “lack” of a penis.

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62 I want to point out here an intriguing absence in Vilaró’s work. While he focuses attention on the dance of an anonymous African woman, whom he understands as a type of “ancestor” to contemporary Afro-Uruguayans, Vilaró only briefly refers to the famous Uruguayan dancers, Rosa Luna and Martha Gularte. Vilaró’s mention of these two women – whom he certainly had the opportunity to meet and watch – is reduced to a few lines in the last pages of the book. He was known to have befriended Rosa Luna, who dedicates a page of her autobiography to him. Vilaró has also painted Rosa Luna several times. They are more like caricatures and the stylized exaggeration of her features are repeated by other artists. This omission is repeated in another book on Uruguayan dance (Assunção, 2001), where Vilaró contributes a chapter on Afro-Uruguayan influenced styles. Again, he paints a general picture that does not mention specific dancers, something that diverges from the specificities offered by other authors in the rest of the book. Whiteness is individualized and blackness is anonymous.
onto a nearby object. Like other critics, I do not take Freud’s focus on female castration literally. Instead, I want to pursue the idea that the fetish signals a disavowal. What is being disavowed through the fetish of black bodies and spaces, particularly the *conventillo*? Recall Mohanram’s argument that the dominant subject both marks and then disavows difference:

> It is this double move of disavowing difference (between marked and unmarked bodies) and the simultaneous insistence of difference (between man and beast) that allows for the unmarked body to be presented as prior to consciousness, and as originary. What the unmarked body manages to occlude by this double move is the fact that notions of marked and unmarked, embodied and disembodied, are all social relationships of domination and exploitation.

(Mohanram, 1999, pp. 38-39)

Emphasizing the embodiment of others, marking their excessive corporeality is implicit in constructing a hierarchy of bodies, while at the same time denying that this is a function of power.

Here, I want to point out that several of the key moments recalled by Páez involve passing through the “threshold” of blackness; the initial entrance into the *conventillo* is repeated and perhaps relived in various ways. These entrances seem to have a powerful hold on the subject. I want to suggest that what is being fetishized is the boundary or “colorline” itself. The subject perhaps experiences a loss of the boundary when he “enters blackness;” he realizes the boundary is far more porous and ambiguous than he had thought. The subsequent fetishizations – of the black woman’s body, the clotheslines, etc. – are really an attempt to re-establish difference in order to reconstitute the boundary between the self and the Other. The fetishization is a disavowal of the fact that the boundary is not solid; the boundary is a fiction that may dissolve if the subject lets down his guard. It is ephemeral and requires constant maintenance. “The identification and defense of high/low boundaries can only be achieved through constant vigilance,” and I would add that this vigilance requires fetishization (Pile, 1996, p. 176).

This grasping for boundaries is highlighted in another anecdote, where the subject “immerses” himself in blackness. Páez Vilaró (2000) recalls that in his childhood he had wanted to join a group of drummers that he viewed from his window, but he was held back by fear. The drummers are described as “bird-like” and “phantasmagoric” figures (Páez Vilaró, 2000, p. 107), a “bestialization,” a linguistic device that distances subjects
from their humanity (Morrison, 1992). As an adult, he encounters a similar group of drummers and this time he joins them. What follows is the author’s triumphant march through the neighbourhood: “As I advanced, I felt powerful, a member from that moment, of the group” (Páez Vilaró, 2000, p. 142). Triumphant, I would suggest, because his masculinity is nourished by the drummers’ presumed virility – “a hint of blackness” (Wade, 2001, p. 860) – as long as he is not permanently marked by his association with the group and its traces of inhumanity.

“Swallowed up” by the Conventillo: Transgression, Engulfment, and White Masculinity

Sherene Razack (1998, p. 357) contends that transgressing into a “degenerate” space and leaving it “unscathed” is a marker and maker of hegemonic masculinity. It is through symbolic and/or material interactions with racialized/impoverished people and spaces that dominant subjects gain a sense of superiority. For Razack, this dynamic is epitomized in the encounter between the john and the prostitute. The man who seeks out a prostitute is taking “a journey from the high regions of bourgeois respectability to the low regions of degeneracy;” it is inherently “a journey of exploration and conquest, hence, of violence” (Razack, 1998, p. 360). Racialized space can be transgressed directly or vicariously, through representational and/or cultural practices. For example, adopting the language, dress, or cultural practices of the racialized Other may consitute a racial transgression that bestows an air of “cool” upon racially dominant subjects (Lott, 1995).

Páez’s “journey into negritude” can be framed as both conquest and transgression. He invites these readings through his language and actions, which suggest the imperial explorer and the bohemian flâneur. Páez “discovers” Medio Mundo. He explores Uruguayan and then African “negritude.” He casts his “imperial eyes” upon the neighbourhood and its people (M. L. Pratt, 1992) and he maps the territory, by defining the limits and ascribing who belongs where. At the same time, Páez does not merely gaze. His journey involves transgressing the boundaries of his race and class. He leaves his bourgeois home for the excitement of the colourful, and implicitly “degenerate,” conventillo.
Here Páez closely resembles the 19th-century flâneur. As described by various
theorists, the flâneur is a complex and emblematic figure (Benjamin, 1999; Pile, 1996).
He is the well heeled, man-about-town; the artist, who is not content to stay in “his”
bourgeois space, but strolls the streets looking for titillation in the modern city.
The flâneur is particularly attracted to the spaces that society views as degenerate such as the
slum and the red-light district. There he can transgress the stuffiness of his class and
access life in the raw. Because the flâneur is the subject made through geographic
transgression, where he walks and what he seems to be transgressing provides a map of
the city’s “grids of meaning” (Pile, 1996, p. 176). As Pile notes,

Embodied subjects place themselves into topographies of meaning, identity and
power which value certain aspects of bodies and subjectivity more highly than
others: people are expected to be and behave along lines sanctioned by society.
(Pile, 1996, p. 168)

The flâneur goes to where he has learned that social boundaries should be found in order
to transgress and perhaps transcend them. The flâneur is a conflicted figure. If he wants
to transgress social boundaries, why is he also complicit in maintaining them?

In Entre Colores I have already shown ways that the white male subject reinstalls
the boundaries into which he “trespasses.” Crossing borders can be unsettling because it
foregrounds the ambiguity and constructedness of the presumed boundaries (McClintock,
1995a). The boundaries are not as fixed as they seem and the flâneur risks becoming one
with the racialized or economically marginalized. He would lose his bohemian edge and
his privileged status. To build upon this point, I want to recount a recent interview with
Páez by Nelson Caula for Intercanaltv. The snippet again involves his first encounter with
Medio Mundo. He recalls how he was mesmerized by a group of drummers, followed
them to their home, and was then “swallowed” by the conventillo:

\[
\text{Sin darme cuenta...llegó a un conventillo...a la puerta de un gran conventillo, un gran conventillo que se abría como una garganta...me dejé tragar por las ropas tendidas que parecían dientes, la dentadura y me dejé masticar ahí adentro.}
\]

(Without noticing it…I arrived at a conventillo…at the gates of a great conventillo, a conventillo that opened up like a throat…I let myself be swallowed up by the hanging laundry, which seemed like teeth, a whole set of teeth, and I let myself be chewed up in there.)
The author revels in being caught up in the excitement of the conventillo, but he also betrays a certain anxiety. There is something menacing about entering a giant “throat,” which “swallows” and “chews you up.” Compellingly, it is the hanging laundry – the symbols of racialized gendered labour – that is projected as the threat. This metaphor is fascinating because it evokes the psychoanalytic concept of engulfment. Psychoanalytic theory holds that once the child has accepted its separation from the mother, it fears merging with an Other again. The child fears “engulfment,” the condition which preceded the loss of the mother. Zöe Newman provides a helpful synopsis of this process:

After the infantile development of self-consciousness, the prospect of once more merging (with the mother) produces fear, which is externalized through projection. The projected fear can then be managed by attending to its perceived external cause – “others,” who are constructed as the manifestation of the child’s difference from its “mother,” and thus of past loss of omnipotence, and future loss of self-control through return to the chaos of maternal oneness. By definition, projecting the fear outside itself guards against the subject’s dissolution because it returns attention to the boundary between self and other.

(Newman, 2002, pp. 22-23)

Yet, “‘boundary consciousness’ is…multiply ambivalent” because merging recalls the pleasures of unity and the boundary implies separation from the mother (Newman, 2002, p. 23). Thus engulfment holds out the potential for both pleasure and further loss.

Newman follows other theorists who have argued that the fear of engulfment is linked to gendering and racialization; it is a fear of losing the spatial boundary between the self and the Other (Kirby, 1996; Theweleit, 1977). Klaus Theweleit (1977) shows how the fear of engulfment by the “masses” is a recurrent anxiety in the journals and iconography of Germany’s Freikorps. For these soldiers, the “mass” was embodied by communists, Jews, prostitutes, nurses, women, gays. Beyond being a mere ideological tool, the fear of was formative of these subjects. For these men, racist misogynist violence was a defense against engulfment. Theweleit does not propose this fear as an excuse for racism, but to show how dominance is premised upon the control of embodied and spatialized social boundaries.

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63 The interview is for Intercanaltv, a web-based channel. It is undated, but Páez Vilaró states he is 81 years old at the time, which puts the date at 2004 or 2005.

64 The Freikorps was an elite body of fascist soldiers who were active between the two world wars.
I am in not equating the subject in *Entre Colores* with the fascist soldiers. Yet, I want to draw attention to how the *conventillo*-as-throat metaphor evinces the negotiation of subjectivity through a similar anxiety. Unlike the soldiers, Páez delights in being “swallowed up.” There is a pleasure to be had in merging. At the same time, this metaphor reveals a conceptualization of the *conventillo* people as the “mass.” There is a danger of being “chewed up” and not coming back out, a potential loss of bodily and spatial control. As Kirby points out regarding the “cartographic” subject:

> Part of the function of mapping, it would seem, is to ensure that the relationship between knower and known remains unidirectional. The mapper should be able to “master” his environment, occupy a secure and superior position in relation to it, without it affecting him in return. This stance of superiority crumbles when the explorers’ cartographic aptitude deteriorates. To actually be in the surroundings, incapable of separating one’s self from them in a larger objective representation, is to be lost.

(Kirby, 1996, p. 48)

What is at stake in being swallowed up or absorbed into the *conventillo* is the loss of power.

The “mass” is evoked at several points in *Entre Colores*. For instance, it is discernible when Páez describes his exhibition of paintings within Medio Mundo on the occasion of the 1954 UNESCO International Conference, which took place in Montevideo. Many people from the neighbourhood and beyond went to see the exhibition. It was unusual for such an event to take place within a *conventillo*. This is how Páez (169) describes the scene:

> Alertados por el boca a boca de las cuadras, desde tempranas horas una fila interminable de vecinos fue concentrándose en la calle para asistir a la exposición. Eso colmó de tal forma el patio interior, la parte alta del Mediomundo, las veredas y la calle, que, por más esfuerzo que hizo la policía para evitarlo, lo que quiso ser un evento se transformó en un tapón.

> Se intentó hacer un callejón entre la muchedumbre para que los invitados de UNESCO pudieran ingresar en el caserón, pero resulto imposible. Los cuadros flotaban sobre los hombros de la gente; mis amigos, en precaución, los retiraron de los atriles.

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65 McClintock notes that Albert Munby experienced anxiety when he saw “his drudge,” Hannah Cullwick, dirty and tired from the work she had done for others. His anxiety was produced, not by her condition—which he enjoyed when it was for his pleasure—but by the feeling that he did not “own” her. Others were responsible for Cullwick’s drudgery; he was not in control of this social order.
En el medio de la confusión no pudimos contener nuestros deseos, y los tambores se desbocaron junto a las bailarinas y los bailarines que saltaron a mostrar sus virtudes. El patio terminó convirtiéndose en un collage de tamboriles, turbantes, funcionarios, lubolos, vecinos o diplomáticos que acompañaron como pudieron el desarrollo de la exótica demostración.

(Alerted through word of mouth, block by block, an endless lineup of neighbours started to form from the early hours of the morning to attend the exhibition. This filled up the courtyard of Mediomundo, the upper floors, the sidewalks, and the street; as much as the police tried to prevent it, the event was transformed into a jam.

There was an attempt to make a path in the crowd so that the UNESCO guests could enter the place, but it was impossible. The frames floated on people’s shoulders; my friends took the precaution of removing them from the stands.

In the midst of the confusion, we could not contain our desires, and the drums let loose alongside the dancers, who jumped up to show their talents. The courtyard ended up being converted into a collage of drummers, turbans, officials, black drummers, neighbours, and diplomats, who followed this exotic spectacle the best they could.)

(Páez Vilaró, 2000pp. 169-170)

Confusion and chaos reign, as in the Punta del Este opening, and the paintings end up on people’s shoulders. I had the opportunity to speak to a couple of people from the neighbourhood, who were present at this time and they confirm that this day was chaotic. One of them is Marta Silva, who lived in Palermo. She recalls that she was unable to enter Medio Mundo that day to view the exhibition due to the number of people. Another informant, Cachila, is the son of one of Páez’s best friends in Medio Mundo, the patriarch Angel Silva. Cachila is still fond of the artist and calls him a “friend of the family.” What is interesting is that Cachila attributes the excitement and commotion to Páez:

Porque también por intermedio de Carlos Páez Vilaró, siempre hubo ese….Por ejemplo, Vilaró trajo a la UNESCO al conventillo. La misión del UNESCO la trajo un año. Trajo a Liza Minnelli, cuando era famosa, la actriz. Trajo a …..bueno….una infinidad de artistas. Me acuerdo que eran las llamadas por ejemplo, el día de llamadas, el conventillo se llenaba con la gente curiosa que quería entrar al conventillo a ver como es. Había, a veces, había que cortar la entrada al conventillo porque si no se llenaba tanto que tenían miedo que se viniera abajo.

(What happened was that because of Carlos Páez Vilaró, there was always that….For example, Vilaró brough UNESCO to the conventillo. The UNESCO mission came one year. He brough Liza Minneli, when she was a famous actress.
He brought, well, he brought an infinity of artists. I remember that during the llamadas, for example, the day of the llamadas, the conventillo would fill up with people who were curious and wanted to enter the conventillo to see what it was like. Sometimes they had to cut off the entrance to the conventillo because it would be so full of people that they were afraid that it would come down.

(Cachila, 2006, personal communication)

I would not want to claim that one person’s perspective of this moment is more accurate than another’s. I do want to point out that there are different ways of framing the moment and this may have to do with the negotiation of the self in relation to the space. While for Páez, the chaos emanated from the neighbourhood and its people, some of the residents felt that it was the artist himself who generated the buzz surrounding the conventillo – he took movie stars, other artists, writers, and the UNESCO mission there – leading to the crowds and the “chaotic” atmosphere.

I also want to explore how the conceptualization of the conventillo residents as a “mass” is visible in several Páez paintings. Take for instance figure 8, which is titled Inaugurando mi caja de pomos, surgió mi primer oleo, (1950). Here the artist depicts a colourful blur of bodies. We can distinguish only black faces and big red mouths. The colours and shapes of the clothing suggest typical comparsa costumes. The blurring is also present in figure 9 (Mi visión de la calle Ansina, una noche de llamadas, “My vision of Ansina street,” undated). This painting offers a view of the street Ansina during the procession of the “call of the drums.” The mass of black faces and bodies are indistinguishable from one another. The only details on the faces are bright, crescent-shaped smiles. Some of the heads also have kerchiefs; presumably these denote women. Páez is obviously drawing on a long tradition of depicting Afro-descended people with big mouths and broad smiles (see also figure 10, Lavanderas del arroyo, undated; and figure 11, Candombe de Amague, undated). I want to draw attention to how the bodies blend into the landscape and into each other. Arguably some detail has been lost in the reproduction, but we can see that there is a general lack of specificity to the black figures. The perspective of the painting draws the viewer towards the vanishing point near the centre. To get there, the viewer is symbolically surrounded on both sides by a sea of

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66 These are paintings from Páez’s first exhibitions and they are reproduced in Arte y Parte, a book he published in 1999. The undated paintings were probably circa 1950, since this was the date of his first exhibition.
crescent smiles that are all facing the viewer – as if “he” is being invited in. Viewed alongside the above anecdote, the street itself resembles one wide-open mouth; the white building-tops evoke a full set of teeth leading to the darkness of the throat. Páez portrays a jubilant, undifferentiated, yet potentially threatening mass, perhaps echoing how he experienced the space. I want to consider the implications of these paintings – knowing the pervasiveness of this iconography – for how the conventillo is imagined on a larger scale. I want to think about the representational space being constituted through the conventillo. Recall that:

Representational spaces embody complex symbolisms, which have conscious and unconscious resonances and are therefore linked to “underground social life,” which take on meaning only in the process of exchange and as part of a system of differences; and, because meaning is associated with value, it is here that power relations are at their most visible.

(Pile, 1996, p. 157)

In Entre Colores, as in the paintings, we see the conventillo imagined as a homogeneous mass of black bodies. It is a place that provokes desires as well as fears of losing oneself. I have already noted that blackness has menacing implications within the “system of differences” and “underground social life” of Latin America and the West. In Páez’s paintings we have an example of how some artists may participate in reflecting, as well as constituting, the imagined threat of blackness. My interpretation of the paintings is supported by Foster’s argument that (at least some) modern artists can be understood interlocutors for the West’s complicated relationship with the “primitive” Other. For Foster, (1985, p. 46) primitivism in modern art “emerged” as “a fetishistic discourse, a recognition and disavowal not only of primitive difference but of the fact that the West – its patriarchal subjectivity and socius – is threatened by loss, by lack, by others.” The black mass produces anxiety because it threatens to engulf the subject thus threatening the loss of subjectivity. Paradoxically, the white subject would also be lost without it. Thus difference is continually renewed and disavowed.

I found a journalistic account of the neighbourhood, which textually mirrors Páez’s journey, iconography, and “appreciation” of blackness. It is an article from Mundo Uruguayo titled “Un Harlem en Montevideo” (Harlem in Montevideo) (Portogalo,
Portogalo tells readers of his stroll down a central street in Palermo, Ansina. The journalist makes the comparison to Harlem due to the neighbourhood’s mix of ethnicities, its “lively Jews” and “gesticulating Italians.” What particularly characterized the neighbourhood for Portogalo was its black inhabitants, who ranged from “the silhouette of a young woman of colour, who reminds us of Figari” and “the youths, who would pile up in the corners; they consult with each other, they laugh. The laughter – it should be noted – jumps off their lips with the rhythm of milonga, meaty lips that are hard as metal” (Portogalo, 1944). The black woman’s body, the black meaty lips, and the huddled mass of teenagers come alive in this journalistic account. Portogalo’s narrative predates Páez’s paintings and writings. My point is not to make a causal connection between one and the other, but to point out how the conventillo within Páez’s representational space speaks of and through the greater national context.

The following reflection from Ruben Galloza (in Porzecanski & Santos, 2006) suggests how subjects feel themselves constituted through the fear of blackness. Galloza (1926-2002) is a fitting counterpoint to Páez since they were contemporaries. He was a self-taught Afro-Uruguayan painter, who hung out in the neighbourhoods of Sur and Palermo. He remembers being positioned as the “black menace”:

When you’re a black youth, you’re fifteen years old in Montevideo, back then, you suffered. You suffered tons and tons of discriminations, discriminatory acts, tons and tons of them….We were rigorously discriminated against, at parties, you would have friends that you hung out with every day and there would be a party and you wouldn’t be invited. Then later you would find out that it had been so and so’s sister’s birthday and you hadn’t been invited. In each group of friends there were always two or three black guys. And the black guy was the one who could ruin everything with violence. The black man was always the one who fought, he was the bravest one. He was the one who wouldn’t let himself be taken advantage of…He was obligated… [they would say] “be careful don’t mess with him because he’ll punch you.”

(Ruben, in Porzecanski & Santos, 2006, pp. 109-110)

As previously stated, Mundo Uruguayo was a weekly news magazine. See appendix for full description. Galloza’s life history is contained in Historias de Exclusión, described in chapter two and the appendix. An article in the Los Angeles Times notes that “unlike Vilaró, Galloza lived in the neighborhood because of necessity. The son of a black domestic servant and an Italian father whom he never met, Galloza worked as a golf caddy, messenger and museum guard while pursuing a career as a self-taught painter” (Rotella, 1998). Galloza exhibited widely around the world and sold over 3000 paintings in his lifetime. He was also immersed in the conventillo community and culture. In the 1950s, Galloza and others successfully campaigned for the official inclusion of the llamadas (an Afro-Uruguayan drumming procession) in Carnival.
For Galloza the dominant construction of black masculinity demanded the performance of aggression. His friends used the fear of blackness as a weapon. Galloza himself disavowed the “tough guy” script, but the script did not necessarily disavow him.\textsuperscript{70} Recall Páez’s perception of the “phantasmagoric” drummers, the young men hanging out on the streets, not unlike Galloza and his friends. Is it possible to think that black and white masculinities are not being constituted relationally?

**Conclusion: Making Boundaries Through the Fetish of the Conventillo**

In this chapter I have argued that in *Entre Colores*, as well as in some of Páez’s paintings, black bodies, places, and specific items within the conventillo are fetishized, a process that is key to the fashioning of the dominant, white subject. In Páez Vilaró (2000) the conventillo becomes associated with a primordial Africa, the clotheslines, the carnivalesque body, and the black “mass” which threatens to engulf the subject if he is not careful to reinstall the boundaries.

The white subject’s relation to blackness, however, cannot be oversimplified. Blackness is admired and desired, as much as it is essentialized and objectified. *Entre Colores* is full of praise and support for Afro-Uruguayan artists and writers, but Páez’s intentions are never the issue. I believe that the contradictions – the simultaneous desire for, and distancing from, blackness – are instructive. I want to propose that the ambivalence signals the ongoing struggle for the white subject to make himself through blackness, without being “engulfed” by the “mass,” which he is implicated in constituting. I believe it is significant that descriptions of potential merging with blackness are followed by attempts to reinstall difference. When the subject enters the conventillo, he seems to be overcome with the emotions caused by the music and the energy of the place. This moment is narrated as overwhelming, yet there is an immediate distancing that occurs. Through references to a “faraway place,” Africa, and mysterious

\textsuperscript{70} An oft-cited example of racism continues to be the exclusion of black people from night-clubs and social spaces (as revealed in key informant interviews and Rodriguez, 2001). Not only are these instances humiliating, they are also sometimes physically violent. Jorginho Gularte, an acclaimed musician and the son of the afore-mentioned Martha Gularte, was brutally beaten by bouncers in an incident that was never resolved.
traditions, a cultural moment that had a deep effect on the subject is objectified and rendered foreign and primitive. The subject seizes upon “objects” to signify difference: the clotheslines, the “huddling grandmothers,” the dancing sexualized bodies, the mouths, the lips. I am arguing that these items are fetishized in order to maintain a racial boundary that is at risk of dissolution. I want to emphasize, however, that this is not a linear process. There is a messiness to the way that subjectivity is installed through blackness.

This dance between the avowal and disavowal of blackness present in Entre Colores is relevant for thinking about the national context, where blackness is largely folklorized and the normative subject is constituted as white. To what extent is the national identity enhanced through a “hint” of blackness, which cannot be wholly embraced if the nation is to project whiteness? To what extent is the national affection for the conventillo an attempt to disavow the construction of whiteness through blackness, a disavowal of the porosity and ambiguity between these two categories, and a disavowal of racial hierarchy itself? Of course places and representations do not mean the same thing to all people and not all are threatened by blackness. Entre Colores presents the perspective of one white masculine subject, but I would argue, however, that it is constituted through and constitutive of the national context. I strengthen this argument by showing that the conventillo’s blackness produces similar dynamics of fascination and anxiety in the next chapter in my examination of the reception of the national icon, Rosa Luna. Because Rosa Luna performed on a national stage, the carnival, her reception provides an optic into the national subjectivity writ large. I argue that this performer embodied the boundary of the conventillo. The reception of her performance is significant for the ways it suggests the evocation of the national symbolic order vis-à-vis black femininity.

Below I reproduce lyrics that bridge the themes of this and the next chapter on Rosa Luna:

*Callecita de adoquines*
*que harán vibrar con sus cantos*
*los negros de roncas voces*
*los negros de duras manos.*

Little cobbled street
Which will soon be made to vibrate
by the blacks with their hoarse voices
the blacks with their hardened hands.
Barrio Sur and Palermo, as well as Rosa Luna are featured in quite a few Uruguayan songs in various genres. The performer was proud to be on the tip of more than one songwriter’s pen. José Carbajal (b. 1943) is a canto popular singer, well-known in Uruguay and Argentina. The song celebrates the neighbourhood, but with a harsher tone than Entre Colores. His is a coarser, grittier version of Barrio Sur, befitting perhaps, Carbajal’s fame as a working-class songsmith. Though less luscious than Páez, the writer uses a familiar shorthand to depict the conventillos. As in Entre Colores, there is a “metaphysical condensation” between people and animals (Morrison, 1992, p. 67). Also palpable is the “black mass” suggested by the “piled up” children and the “swarm of little

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71 One of the typical comparsa characters is a man who dances balancing a broom on different parts of his body.
72 Pardo is an informal racial classification for someone who is dark, part black. It is not a widely used term in Uruguay as it is in Brazil.
73 Inquilinato is a word for a type of rooming house. This word is often used interchangeably with conventillo.
black ones.” Rosa Luna is crammed in between the “greeting” dove, the trembling dancers, and the swallow-like coloured children. She is one with the mass. In this and other popular songs, commentaries, and articles, Rosa Luna embodies the *conventillo*. The performer herself was not opposed to being portrayed this way. Her autobiography thanks Carbajal for “immortalizing” her in *Yacumenza* and she encouraged the association between herself and the neighbourhood (Luna, 1988b, p. 7).74

In the next chapter, I turn to an examination of the vedette’s embodiment of the *conventillo* through her performance. Drawing on psychoanalytic theory, I argue that the reception of Rosa Luna makes visible how the symbolic order may be roused in a public space through the performance of black femininity.

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74 Yacumenza was the name of Medio Mundo’s soccer team and also their trophy/equipment room. There is an oft-repeated story that it was so named because when the soccer players – who were also comparsa drummers – would start playing their drums an immigrant neighbour would say, “Yacumenza los negros con los tambores. Yacumenza.” This phrase means, “There start the black with there drums again, there they start.” The story’s humour hinges on the neighbour’s mispronunciation of “Ya comienza” and the name stuck.
Chapter Five
Rosa Luna: Exposing her Body, Revealing the Nation

Introduction

Hoy preparo mis valijas para volver a Australia, y no termino de convencerme de cuál es el magnetismo que despierta mi presencia en el exilio. ¿Sólo les recuerdo el Carnaval, o represento una mística o una tradición del uruguayo tipo? ¿O es mi baile la expresión del sueño de libertad de los negros, que este pueblo toda ha hecho suyo?

(Today I pack my suitcases to return to Australia, and I have yet to understand what is the attraction that my presence awakens in exile. Is it only that I remind them of Carnival, or do I represent a certain mystique, or a typical Uruguayan tradition? Or, is my dance an expression of the dream of freedom of black people, that the [Uruguayan] people as a whole have adopted?)

(Rosa Luna, 1988, p. 47)

Perhaps no one figure embodies the national romance with Afro-Uruguayan culture and the conventillo quite like Rosa Luna. Rosa Amelia Luna, is one of several legendary Afro-Uruguayan figures to have emerged from Barrio Sur. Born in Medio Mundo in 1937, and later residing in various locales including the conventillo Ansina, Luna started out as a carnival vedette in the 1950s and became one of the most well-known and loved figures of carnival until her death in 1993. The vedette is the head dancer of a comparsa (company of musicians and dancers). The vedette typically dresses provocatively in a scanty costume and wears a lavish head-dress (with feathers, etc.) and high heels. Variations of the vedette appear in different carnivals throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.

Although she came to prominence through the Carnival, Rosa Luna’s reach eventually extended to other arenas. In the 1980s, she wrote a weekly column for a Montevideo daily, La República. During this part of her life she also became known for her social activism, particularly against poverty and racism. Many Afro-Uruguayans remember her as someone who always identified with “the race.” In addition, she acted as a sometime ambassador of the nation, performing for exiled audiences abroad, who welcomed her as a reminder of home. It was during one such tour that Rosa Luna died unexpectedly in Toronto in 1993.
Since her death, Rosa Luna has been memorialized in several ways, including the issue of a national stamp bearing her likeness (see figure 12). She was also one of the key figures celebrated during the 2007 Día del Patrimonio (Heritage Day). The theme for that year was recognizing the contributions of Afro-Uruguayans to the national culture. Rosa Luna, along with the former vedette Martha Gularte, and the tango singer, Lagríma Ríos were all honoured for contributing to Uruguayan heritage and culture.

Rosa Luna’s emergence as a national icon demands closer attention. How did this impoverished black woman from the conventillo, with very little formal education, rise to the status of national icon in a Eurocentric nation? The quote from Luna in the epigraph suggests she also pondered this question. She wondered why Uruguayans were so attracted to her, even in exile. In the last chapter I argued that, the fetishized conventillo embodies the boundary between blackness and whiteness. In this chapter, I make visible how a performance of black femininity is taken up as the embodiment of Afro-Uruguayan blackness through a metonymic linkage with the conventillo. I consider the implications of this embodiment – of the performer and her performance – by drawing on psychoanalytic (Bergner, 2005; Nast, 2000) and performance theory (Browning, 1995; Ford-Smith, 2005; D. Taylor, 2003) and by considering the historical place of the black woman’s body in the “New World” (McKittrick, 2000a; Nast, 2000; Philip, 1997). Rosa Luna’s performance needs to be understood as tapping into and disrupting archetypes about black womanhood in Uruguayan society. I argue that Rosa Luna’s performance is an instance where the symbolic order is being negotiated in a public space through a performance of black femininity. Her heightened reception reveals the centrality of the desire for, and disavowal of, blackness in the making of white subjectivity.

Her performance is compelling for the spatial contradictions it points up: Here is a woman who “should” have felt confined by the conventillo, but who is instead performing an exaggerated black femininity within a public space. An examination of responses to Rosa Luna shows that her performance is multivalent, signifying sexuality and the “black maternal,” as well as black affirmation. This analysis of her performance may contribute to understanding the significance of the sexualized performances of black femininity that recur throughout carnivals, cabarets, and other spaces throughout the Americas.
My intention is neither to present a narrow reading of Rosa Luna that forecloses other possible interpretations, nor one that belittles the artist’s talent. As Honor Ford-Smith (2005, p. 50) indicates, critical analysis of a performance should not be considered to deny its multidimensionality or its artistic value. A primary reason to critically analyze performance, however, is that “the body says what cannot be spoken” (Browning, 1995, p. 9). What I present is an analysis that attends to the body and performance as “producing sources and resources for knowing” (Ford-Smith, 2005, p. 32), that are located within a historical context and social relations.

This chapter is organized as follows. I begin by reviewing the texts analyzed in this chapter, followed by a brief biographical sketch. I then explain how the role of the vedette was introduced to Montevidean carnival and how the vedette was embraced as representing the “people.” This leads into a discussion of performance theory (Browning, 1995; Ford-Smith, 2005; D. Taylor, 2003) and the production of the black female body within the Americas (McKittrick, 2000a; Philip, 1997). I then analyze Rosa Luna’s performance, attending to her demeanour, her self-reflections, and audience perceptions. In addition, I also consider how her performance may have been received differently, embraced by some as the “black maternal” and by others as the embodiment of the “people.” Lastly, I consider whether the question of Rosa Luna’s performance is “reification or resistance” of dominant notions of black femininity.

**Primary Texts**

The narratives examined in this chapter are from two primary sources. *Sin tanga y sin tongo* (1988, 118 pp.) is Luna’s autobiography (1933-1994). In this text, she recounts her early childhood, youth, career, and thoughts. The book was published in 1988, when the author was also writing a semi-weekly column for the daily newspaper, *La República*. The tone is conversational. The book is written as a compilation of short essays with titles such as “the stage,” “yesterday,” “today,” and “woman.” The book is illustrated with photos and illustrations of Rosa Luna and Medio Mundo.

*Una mujer llamada Rosa Luna* is an official biography written by Ettore Pierri (1994). Because of the subject’s death in 1993, it was published posthumously. The author was,
and is, a reporter with the Montevideo daily newspaper _La República_. He was also a friend of Rosa Luna. This book includes some of Rosa Luna’s own reflections on her life, as well as some of her newspaper columns, and many reflections on the performer from other people. They include members of the music community, the Afro-Uruguayan community, government representatives, as well as anonymous persons. I draw data from this book in my discussion of Rosa Luna’s performance in chapter five. Both books are written in the spirit of sustaining the “legend” of Rosa Luna. The biography and autobiography also depict an aspect of _conventillo_ life that is not a part of the folkloric depictions. As becomes evident below, there is little nostalgia in Rosa Luna’s remembrances of her early years. Pierri’s biography is valuable for the way that it documents the many responses to Rosa Luna as a performer, activist, and friend. I draw on some of this material when I consider the reception of her performance. Another source for this chapter was _La República_, a Montevideo daily newspaper founded in 1988. I looked at this newspaper from 1988 to the early 1990s to research Rosa Luna’s newspapers columns, written in this time period.

Aside from these texts, I also refer to several journalistic articles that have appeared in the press and on the Internet over the years.

**Biographical Sketch**

Rosa Luna’s early childhood was spent in Medio Mundo, where her mother struggled to raise fifteen children in very impoverished conditions with an abusive husband. She grew up hungry, witnessed the funerals of several siblings, and had to leave school at age nine to help support the family. Her childhood memories are grim:

*Aún conservo en mis retinas la imagen desolada de rodillitas flacas, ojitos saltones con llantos amargos de mis hermanos, en esa pieza fría y oscura que fue mi casa. Aquel techo albergaba el hambre y la necesidad que aumentaba a medida que crecíamos, apoderándose de nuestras almas puras e ingenuas...*

(My retinas preserve the desolate image of the skinny knees, the bulging eyes, and the bitter cries of my siblings, in that cold and dark room that was my home. That roof housed hunger and a great need, which increased as we grew, taking hold of our pure and naïve souls...)

(Luna, 1988b, p. 18)
While barely an adolescent, Rosa Luna learned that her maturing body made her sexual prey when she was doing domestic work. As mentioned in chapter three, she was harassed and assaulted by male employers. Eventually, she began to see her body’s perceived sensuality not as a liability, but as source of power. She learned to “work it.” She embraced night life, hanging out in “bohemian” bars frequented by men. Her autobiography makes reference to her time as a “woman of the night” (Luna, 1988b, p. 29). One of the most harrowing experiences of her life occurred at this point, when she killed a john in self-defense. Rosa Luna was absolved of any wrongdoing, which many attribute to the reciprocal love between her and the Uruguayan people (Ausserbauer, 2007).

Through her association with Barrio Sur and Palermo, Rosa Luna began dancing with the comparsas in her adolescence, eventually becoming a vedette. She felt she was “fortunate” to have been born in the conventillo, benefiting from the culturally enriching atmosphere, where candombe played without “regard for the date” (Luna, 1988b, p. 17). From the 1980s onward, Rosa Luna began to define herself more in terms of popular activism. Publicly, people began to see beyond the scantily-clad body. She participated in campaigns to free Nelson Mandela and spoke out against poverty and for the betterment of conditions for Afro-Uruguayans. At this time she also began to write a weekly column for La República. Sectors of the Afro-Uruguayan community welcomed her into their organizational efforts (Mundo Afro) and they probably benefited from Rosa Luna’s public profile. The performer accrued fame, but only modest material benefit through her career. Towards the end of her life, when she was busy performing abroad, Rosa Luna was living a comfortable, but far from prosperous existence. She lived in a humble home with her husband and young son.

**Embodying the Popular: Embodying the Conventillo**

Rosa Luna encouraged the association between herself and the conventillo. It was integral to how she perceived herself and how she was perceived as a performer. In her autobiography, Luna closely identifies with her origins:

*Tuve la suerte de nacer en el Medio Mundo, en Cuareim entre Durazno e Isla de Flores. Allí donde los morenos de mi raza repiqueteaban los tamboriles noche a*
noche y hacían temblar las paredes de construcción antigua. Y digo suerte porque en aquel recinto de mil familias, ropas tendidas, y ventanas al cielo, no existía almanaque ni fecha para el carnaval. Todo era cuestión de “ganas” o de “ruidos” que brotaban de ese “infierno grande” como permanente contagio de un barrio humilde; de esperanzas pocas y reveses constantes.

(I was fortunate to be born in Medio Mundo, on Cuareim between Durazno and Isla de Flores. There where the blacks of my race, played the drums each night and made the old walls tremble. And I say I was fortunate, because in that enclosure of a thousand families, hung laundry, and windows to the skies, there was no calendar nor date for Carnival. It was just a matter of “will” or of “noises”, which sprouted from that “great hell,” the permanent contagion of a humble neighbourhood; with few hopes and constant setbacks.)

(Luna, 1988b, p. 17)

Like others, Rosa Luna speaks the conventillo through the clotheslines and carnival. She ties in the music to the poverty, “the permanent contagion of a humble neighbourhood” and suggests that the residents had “few hopes and experienced many setbacks.” She understands the music as a result of, or escape from, the precarious living conditions.

Rosa Luna’s origins were part of her allure. The following article appeared in the online version of the Montevideo daily La República. It pays homage to Rosa Luna, encapsulating the mythical ways that both the performer and Medio Mundo are remembered:

*Rosa Luna. Su nombre y su nacimiento, en el mítico conventillo Medio Mundo, ya predecían un futuro de noches en vela por estar entregada al candombe, y también de las otras, que resulta preferible olvidar. Después de una niñez de privaciones (luego vendría una primera juventud marcada por la prostitución), Rosa Amelia comenzó a brillar como bailarina en las comparsas del barrio.*

(Rosa Luna. Her name and her birth, in the mythical conventillo Medio Mundo, already predicted a future of late nights due to her submission to candombe, and also to other things, which it is preferable to forget. Following a childhood full of privations (later would come a youth marked by prostitution), Rosa Amelia began to shine as a dancer in the neighbourhood comparsas.)

(Ausserbauer, 2007)

The artist’s authenticity is bolstered by her humble beginnings. Some critics believed that she was exploiting her poverty-stricken background for effect and was not truly qualified to speak about social conditions (Luna, 1988a). One of her critics calls her “pretentious” Luna (1988a) responded in her column by chastizing those who do not trust the poor to
be “experts” on poverty, yet know nothing about what it is to walk in their shoes. While her knowledge is questioned, Luna cites the “universidad de la calle” (university of the streets), validating the knowledge gained through experience.

This incident shows that Rosa Luna’s marginal working-class background was instrumental in how she was perceived, and how she projected herself, as someone who was authentically “of the people.” Few critics doubted the veracity of her claims, just her intentions. The performer may have been enhanced by her “popular” image, which she fostered by being photographed with children and at soccer games. I now turn to a history of the vedette’s role in Uruguayan carnival, to situate the performer within a national frame.

The History of the Vedette

Styles and modes of public visibility during carnival have historically described and embodied fundamental aspects of both the organization and contestation of social hierarchies. Hence, it is not surprising that these styles and modes also provide important information about social conduct in Caribbean societies during the rest of the year.

(Aching, 2002, p. 4)

To speak of Rosa Luna, is to implicitly speak of Montevidean carnival from the 1950s onward. To understand her significance, it is therefore necessary to rehearse a brief history of the Afro-Uruguayans relation to this annual event. As Gerard Aching indicates, the organization of carnival reveals much about the organization of society.

Since the nation’s emergence in the 19th-century, Montevideo’s carnival was considered to reflect the nation – whether this was seen in a positive or a negative light. Milita Alfaro (1991) writes that national elites were very concerned about what kind of message carnival transmitted about Uruguayans. There were differing opinions about whether carnival should be a place to let people rid themselves of inhibitions and hierarchies, or whether it should be a restrained, disciplined display of good taste and class. The “good taste” camp dominated by the late 1800s (Alfaro, 1991).

Alfaro contends that these elites linked the project of modernizing the nation with disciplining public displays of “Uruguayaness,” such as the carnival. Montevideo’s carnival became more structured. New rules dictated who could march when and where and costumes were likewise regulated. These regulations favoured more elaborate,
expensive, and Europeanized costumes, thus privileging the upper classes. The effect was a complete change from carnivals of the past. In the 18th and earlier 19th century, carnival was a time when the classes mixed and there was all-out mayhem on the streets. People battled in water fights; women mingled with men; the classes mingled with each other. As Alfaro (1991) and others recount it, it was true Dyonisian debauchery before the Christian lent, confirming Bakhtin’s conception of carnival as the “world upside down.”

The modernizing zeal to regulate carnival, however, resulted in deep changes. By the 20th century, Montevideo’s carnival was much more of a spectator event, where the boundary between the parading performers and the audience was clearly delineated. It became less of a feast and more of a spectacle. Carnival dances became society balls. Transgressions certainly occurred, but within a more regulated environment.

Still, within the carnival parade there were spaces for different types of groups, who identified by their class, racial, political, and social affiliations (Alfaro, 1991; Tomás Olivera Chirimini, 2001). Afro-Uruguayans had always been present in the parades, but candombe and carnival were not formally linked until the late 19th century. As explained in the last chapter, it was not until blackface performers popularized “African” drumming, that Afro-Uruguayan comparsas began to perform this music in the carnival. What is significant to note is that the form of Afro-Uruguayan participation in carnival had to negotiate legal regulations, notions of nationhood, as well as notions about what was considered authentically black or African, how these were perceived, and perceived to be perceived.

By the end of the 19th century, the black comparsas contained several “traditional” characters, which drew on colonial figures. Characters such as the gramillero (medicine man), the Mamavieja (old grandmother/mammy figure) and the bastonero (man with a cane) mixed aspects of religious and historic roles held by Afro-descendants in colonial Montevideo (see figure 13). The vedette was not one of these traditional characters. The origins of the vedette are interesting because they speak of the ways that carnival is seen to mark the nation and, as I argue further on, how the nation relies on specific gendered and racialized embodiments.
Martha Gularte is credited with initiating the vedette role in the Montevideo carnival parade of 1949.\(^\text{75}\) The story of Gularte’s emergence as a vedette has gone down in history (Ganduglia & Blezio, 1998). Every year a carnival queen was selected by a panel of judges made up of prominent citizens. In 1949, a dancer from the US was brought in as the carnival queen. The public reacted negatively to the introduction of a North American in this role and caused an uproar. A review of the weekly magazine Mundo Uruguayo, reveals that in the 1940s and 50s, Montevidean carnival queens tended to be young, white, middle-class women.

In 1949 the audience felt slighted at having a “foreign queen” imposed upon them. Gularte, who was dancing with a comparsa following closely behind, was acclaimed as a far better representative of the Uruguayan people. According to several accounts, she was the better dancer, possessed a nicer figure, and she was “ours.” Gularte recalls that people turned away from the official carnival queen and went crazy for her:

A la gente no le hizo gracia, porque decían: “¡Caramba!, ¿para ir ahí sentada en un carro acaso no habemos acá mujeres uruguayas, bonitas?! Claro: estaban malísimos. Pero cuando me vieron a mí salir como salí, no le daban bola a la Reina del Carnaval; decían: “Ésta es la Reina del Carnaval”. Yo salí toda de blanco. Era un destaque que tenía y levantaba, hacía unos destaque de pierna...La gente se moría, gritaba... ¡Tú sabes que había gente que me agarraba las manos y lloraba! “¡Tú eres nuestra, eres nuestra! ¡Qué tanto esa flaca!” La pobre mujer era muy delgada, todo, las piernas cruzadas... “¡Pero, por favor qué fraude!” Y yo salí de piernas enteras desfilando y caminando. “Ah, no! ¡La morena! ¡La negra, la negra!”

(The people didn’t like it, because they said: “Good grief! Why is that woman sitting on that float, don’t we have our own beautiful Uruguayan women?” Of course, they were very angry. But when they saw me parading, they didn’t pay any attention to the Carnival Queen; they said: “This is our Carnival Queen.” I was wearing all white. I would do these great leg lifts, I lifted my legs...The people died, they shouted...You know that there were people that grabbed my hands and cried! “You are ours, you are ours! Forget that skinny one!” The poor woman was too skinny, her legs all crossed... “What a farce!” [ people said] and I went out with my whole legs parading and walking. “Oh no! the black woman! The black one! the black one!”)

(Gularte in Ganduglia & Blezio, 1998, p. 46)

From that first parade and for the next decade, Gularte carried on as a vedette. Gularte would later reflect that she created this role and that it was inappropriately

\(^{75}\) Gularte’s autobiographical reflections were discussed in chapter three.
applied to young women in other comparsas, who were not professional dancers like herself. In the opinion of many, Gularte was a dancer above all, including Rosa Luna. For Gularte, it was important to distinguish herself from the other young women, who happened into the comparsas through their neighbourhood affiliations. Her relationship to carnival was conflicted. A few years later, despite the public acclamation, Gularte quit the carnival. Rosa Luna, once a rival, was “crowned” as the vedette above all others.

This new and non-traditional character was quickly embraced by audiences and began to mark “Uruguayanness” in very specific ways. The most renowned vedettes, Gularte and Rosa Luna, became nationally known. Some, such as Olivera Chirimini and Varese (2000) feel that the introduction of the vedette signified the “Americanization” of carnival and detracted from the authenticity of candombe. Critics saw the vedette figure coming out of the influence of US showgirls, Rio’s carnival, and the French cabaret scene (Ganduglia & Blezio, 1998; Tomás Olivera Chirimini, 2001). This type of performer is of course seen in carnivals throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. Lewis cites musicologist Luis Ferreira who believes that “the Vedette, more form than substance, is overshadowing traditional figures of the comparsa” (in Lewis, p. 65). Lewis (2003, p. 71) agrees that “the emphasis upon the sexual and the exotic embodied in the vedette diminishes significantly the meaning of the comparsa.”

This perspective echoes with detractors of transformations within Trinidadian carnival, which has seen an increase in the participation of women dancers in the last decades (Franco, 2001). The overt sexuality of the women dancers is seen by purists as taking away from the authenticity of “traditional mas” characters, who are primarily male. Pamela Franco (2001) points out that the traditional characters constitute an invented authenticity, one that privileges (in the Trinidadian case) black, male masquerade figures. Franco argues that the new roles taken up by women challenge the black masculinist projection of the nation.

While the Uruguayan vedette posed similar contradictions for some, the vedette is now an undisputed part of Montevideo’s carnival and this is not my primary focus. Instead, I want to consider what it was about the vedette, particularly as embodied by Rosa Luna, that led to her overwhelming acceptance and eventual take-up as a national figure. What was it that the audience was embracing when they acclaimed Gularte – and
later Rosa Luna – as “true” symbols of “us”, of “Uruguayanness”? I return to Luna’s own questions quoted at the beginning:

¿Sólo les recuerdo el Carnaval, o represento una mística o una tradición del uruguayo tipo? ¿O es mi baile la expresión del sueño de libertad de los negros, que este pueblo toda ha hecho suyo?

(Is it only that I remind them of Carnival, or do I represent a certain mystique, or a typical Uruguayan tradition? Or, is my dance an expression of the dream of freedom of black people, that the [Uruguayan] people as a whole have adopted?)

(Rosa Luna, 1988, p. 47)

What was it about “la negra” or “la morena” that was so readily taken up as a true reflection of the Uruguayan “people”? Undeniably, Martha Gularte and Rosa Luna were embraced for their “popular” appeal. They were excellent representatives of the “popular class” conceived in Latin America as those who occupy “society’s most subordinate social, economic, and political positions” (Streicker, 1995, p. 279). There would have been quite a few in the audience who could identify with these two women. Their humble origins represented a demographic that was seldom visible on the national stage. As Radcliffe and Westwood (1996) indicate:

Moments of popular culture are moments of belonging and this is one very powerful way in which the seduction of national identities takes place offering a space, a “home” to individuals within the broadest time/space frame.

(Radcliffe & Westwood, 1996, p. 82)

Carnival is traditionally a space where those who are not overtly included the rest of year can feel that they belong (Bakhtin, 1968; Matta, 1991). And, I am mindful of García Canclini’s (1995) and others’ contention that the “folk” help to define the nation.

I want to, however, complicate the idea that the vedette is “popular” simply because she represents the “people.” She does, but in a way that is acutely racialized, gendered, and sexualized. To ignore these aspects would not do justice to this emblematic figure. Far form being a “typical” racialized, working-class woman, Rosa Luna – as I will show – embodied a fantasy of black womanhood that was performed within a public space. I argue that Rosa Luna’s performance, at home and abroad, “awakens” aspects of the racialized and gendered symbolic order. Therefore I turn to the idea that it was the performance of the “negra” or the “black woman” that is key to understanding the popularity of the vedette. To what extent was the audience, or at least some of the
audience, consciously or unconsciously embracing the performance of an archetypal black femininity that at once heralds and destabilizes the symbolic order? In order to reflect upon this question, I first outline some elements of performance theory, which situates performance as a socially and historically inflected art form.

Carnival: Performance, Knowledge, and Memory

Carnival has often been studied through the Bakhtinian lens of the “world-upside down.” For Mikhail Bakhtin (1968), carnival was an inversion of everyday hierarchy and a critique of “high” culture. Stallybrass and White (1986) perceptively point out Bakhtin’s limitations, as well as his contributions. Bakhtin identified the reliance of the “high” upon the “low” culture, their mutual construction, opening up a whole line of inquiry into what had previously been regarded as separate traditions. His analysis was limited, however, by a utopic and uncritical vision of “low” or folk culture (Stallybrass and White 1986, p. 7). For Stallybrass and White (1986, p. 16) it is not useful to theorize carnival as either a resistance or a reification, remarking that “the politics of carnival cannot be resolved outside of a close historical examination of particular conjunctures: there is no a priori revolutionary vector to carnival and transgression.” They suggest that:

If we treat the carnivalesque as an instance of a wider phenomenon of transgression we move beyond Bakhtin’s troublesome folkloric approach to a political anthropology of binary extremism in class society. This transposition not only moves us beyond the rather unproductive debate over whether carnivals are politically progressive or conservative, it reveals that the underlying structural features of carnival operate far beyond the strict confines of popular festivity and are intrinsic to the dialectics of social classification as such.

(Stallybrass and White, 1986, p. 26)

Moreover, Stallybrass and White identify the carnivalesque as a mode of transgression, which can reveal a society’s somatic classifications and how they relate to social hierarchies.

The “carnivalesque” mediates between a classical/classificatory body and its negations, its Others, what it excludes to create its identity as such. In this process discourses about the body have a privileged role, for transcodings between different levels and sectors of social and psychic reality are effected through the
intensifying grid of the body. It is no accident, then, that transgressions and the attempt to control them obsessively return to somatic symbols, for these are ultimate elements of social classification itself.

(Stallybrass and White, 1986, p. 26)

To study the vedette, I find it useful to turn to performance theory, with its focus on performance as an object of analysis and as a theoretical lens (Browning, 1995; Ford-Smith, 2005; D. Taylor, 2003). Diana Taylor (2003) holds that although Western cultures often privilege the spoken word/written text as a carrier of knowledge, and as a category of analysis, we need to consider how the body and embodied actions also transmit knowledge and memory. In particular, Taylor (2003, pp. 2-3) argues that “performances function as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated, or what Richard Schechner has called ‘twice-behaved behavior.’” Taylor (2003, p. 3) offers a broad definition of performance that encompasses theatre, as well as events – “bracketed off from those around them,” – that stand out from the everyday. Thus “dances, theatre, ritual, political rallies, funerals – that involve theatrical, rehearsed, or conventional/event-appropriate behaviors” all fall within the realm of performance (D. Taylor, 2003, p. 3). Thus, performance theory encourages an analysis of embodied practices that fall outside of the “text.” It offers a way of looking at the “repertoire,” those sets of practices that become a part of the rituals of a society – whether they are religious or secular – and by which a group or society identifies itself.

Drawing on performance theory, Barbara Browning (1995) thinks about the meanings transmitted through racialized cultural practices in Brazil, primarily candomblé (religion), samba (dance) and capoeira (martial art). Browning holds that these practices contain embodied knowledge, a “social history” that includes the enslavement of black people. Samba, for instance, “narrates a story of racial contact, conflict, and resistance.” (Browning, 1995, p. 2). Samba is a dance/music identified with blackness and carnival in Brazil, as candombe is in Uruguay. Samba, like candombe, is often dismissed as a purely sensual, colourful dance, a celebration. Browning is suggesting that there is an intellectual history that cannot necessarily be verbalized, or accessed in other ways (see also Ford-Smith, 2005).

Browning’s insights are relevant to my study because of the similar status enjoyed by samba and candombe as embodied markers of blackness that also identify the nation.
As Frigerio (2000) documented, the mainstream view is that *candombe* is a form of entertainment and a historical trace that speaks of a more authentic African past. A few historians and musicologists, however, have started to investigate the epistemological aspects of the music (Ferreira, 2001; Tomás Olivera Chirimini & Varese, 2000; Tomás Olivera Chirimini & Varese, 2002). Luis Ferreira, for instance, makes a compelling argument about how *candombe* – as a music that relies on the interconnection between the players – expounds a world-view that is about community and making a whole that is greater than the individual parts.

One of the risks that I see in the work of theorists such as Browning and Ferreira, is that of idealizing racialized cultural forms. As well, there is a danger of reinscribing an essential blackness to these categories, and overlooking the complex history of syncretism in creating these cultural forms. For instance, Browning’s (1995, p. 34) assessment of the dancing black woman’s body in carnival is that it is a celebration of female sexuality. While this may be part of the story, I am arguing that we need to further complicate our understanding of performances of black femininity in a context like carnival by locating the historical meanings of the black woman’s body.

Therefore I want to reiterate the specificities that are called up by the black woman’s body given its historical positioning within the Black Atlantic. I return to Philip’s (1997, discussed in chapter two) insight that due to slavery, black woman’s body became a site or space itself:

> Unlike all other arrivals before or since, when the African comes to the New World she comes to the New World, she comes with nothing. But the body. Her body. The body – repository and source of everything needed to survive in any but the barest sense. Body memory bodymemory. The African body. Its resources: strength, resistance to disease. The African body. Including the space between the legs, the raison d’être of her importation to the New World.

(Philip, 1997, p. 91)

Black femininity was commodified and sexualized throughout the continent. Insidiously, dominant discourses turned sexual exploitation on its head, leading to the myth of black female hypersexuality, which is known throughout the continent (Browning, 1995; Hill-Collins, 1990; D. Roberts, 1994; Spillers, 2003). Looking at the Brazilian context, Barbara Browning notes that:
The typical narrative reverses the roles of sexual power. If the black woman’s bondage forced her to be sexually submissive and her bondage itself was eroticized, she gets inscribed rather as the sexual “initiator,” binding boys in “physical love.” This version of the story allows for a mixed-race child to be born not of rape and repression but of black exuberance and white naïveté. (Browning, 1995, p. 22)

As discussed in the introduction, Brazil’s national narrative draws attention to black women’s sexuality (Silva, 1998). It narrates the nation as created through the “happy” mixing of Portuguese colonizers and black slave women. As a consequence, interracial sex is celebrated as the origin of the nation, erasing the violation of black women, and presupposing their sexual wantonness. Thus, “with the placing of miscegenation at the heart of the national narrative, sex acquires a rather significant place in the text of Brazilianness” (Silva, 1998, p. 221).

In Uruguay and other nations throughout Spanish America, the ultimate commodification of black women’s bodies was expressed through the “Freedom of the Womb Law.” Under this legislation, an enslaved woman could gain her freedom if she bore a white man’s child, and he recognized the child or married her. Petit Muñoz (in Carvalho-Neto, 1965, p. 116) noted that, “el vientre se hacía libre por la libertad de la madre de que formaba parte, con su consecuencia natural de hacer libre al hijo que naciera después.” (The womb was made free by the freedom of the mother of which it was a part, and consequently the child to be born was made free). Townsend-Bell (2007, p. 64) astutely notes that “the conditions for black female slaves’ freedom is defined by…. the sexual nature of her body as the producer of illegitimate offspring and…her lack of control over her body.” Enslaved women had a stab at freedom only insofar as they were sexually subjugated. The “Freedom of the Womb” legislation specified the sexualized mode of black women’s oppression.

I want to return to McKittrick, who emphasizes that black women’s practices and narratives are potential sources of knowledge about oppression and resistance. In particular, McKittrick (2000; 2000a; 2006) studies the writings of women such as Philip, Toni Morrison – as well as earlier writings by Harriet Jacobs and others – to see how they express and disrupt the oppressions that mark their “invented” bodies. She argues that Phillip (1997) provides a useful theoretical framework:
Philip re-positions and scatters the sexed body through time and place in order to delineate how black femininity carries with it, on the body, traces of the past. She achieves this by asking the reader to consider how race/gender inform perspectival space: the black body is seen and inscribed under the rubric of privileged visual ideology...the black woman is seen, rather than heard, and her seemingly stagnant positionality in the New World, as slave-mother-whore or the knowable “space in between,” invokes “[b]ody memory bodymemory” (Philip, 1997, p. 91).

(McKittrick, 2000, p. 228)

Thus, keeping in mind the historicity of performance and the positioning of the black woman’s body within the “New World,” I now turn to Rosa Luna’s performance.

Description of the Performance

De acuerdo a su testimonio, fue la responsable de imponer la modalidad de que la vedette bailase delante de los tambores, como forma de sentir su toque más cerca. Frente a las críticas sobre su paso clásico de candombe, Rosa decía no creer en las coreografías: “Yo bailo sin parar, como un boxeador al que le están pegando y no afloja. Muevo mis carnes. Y te puedo asegurar que camino como nadie sobre unos zapatos taco aguja de trece centímetros que me llevan casi al metro noventa.”

(According to her testimony, she was the one responsible for instigating the custom of the vedette dancing in front of the drums, as a way of feeling the beat from closer up. To the critics of her classic candombe step, Rosa replied that she did not believe in choreography: “I dance without stopping, like a boxer who is being hit and doesn’t let up. I move my flesh. And I can assure you that I can walk like no one else can on needlepoint thirteen centimetre heels that take me to almost one metre ninety.”)

(Chagas, 2007, p. 21)

A drawback to my research is that I have not been able to obtain any film or video footage of Rosa Luna’s performance. Therefore my analysis is based on an examination of photos and descriptions of Rosa Luna’s performance. Due to these limitations, the focus of my analysis is on Rosa Luna’s presence – her costume, her posture, how she presented and saw herself, as well as on the reception of her performance. What did the audience feel when they saw Rosa Luna, and what can we make of these feelings? I rely on the insight that it is crucial to attend to the “milieux and corporeal behaviors such as gestures, attitudes, and tones not reducible to language” (Taylor, 2003, p. 28).
Rosa Luna was not particularly admired for her dancing technique or choreography. Her predecessor Martha Gularte is remembered as a far better dancer. Gularte had studied dance and considered herself a professional. Rosa Luna did not subscribe to a choreographic view of dancing *candombe*. In the quote above, she likens her performance to a show of endurance and to a boxing match. Indeed, several commentators remark on her physical prowess and her perseverance under the pain that must have been inflicted by her attire (Pierri, 1994). Rosa Luna’s typical costume included teetering heels, a diminutive two piece bikini that is secured to stay in place during performance, and a tall, heavy headdress. The costume parallels the glamorizing of pain found in sado-masochistic apparel.

Following the inception of the vedette role, the costumes became increasingly skimpy (see figure 14). The vedette’s costume was a result of various influences including Rio’s carnival, French and U.S. showgirls, and the tastes of the local judges, who awarded monetary prizes to the winning *comparsas* each year. There is also evidence of the dancer’s agency in expressing herself through the costume. Gularte was critical of the trend towards more revealing costumes and cites it as one of the reasons that she left the carnival. She felt that it took away from the dancing, “¿Qué puede bailar una mujer que se pone una tirita arriba del cuerpo?” (How can a woman dance when she is wearing nothing but a little strip on her body?) (Gularte, 1998, p. 46).

Rosa Luna’s figure is often described as statuesque, voluptuous, and sensual. Her signature costume, seen in figure 14, was revealing, but armour-like, in keeping with her fighting analogy. The costume resembles those worn by carnival dancers throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. Metallic breast-plates provided little coverage, but connoted strength. Her body was imposing. Rosa Luna’s was not a dainty, delicate femininity. It was potentially threatening, formidable, an exaggeration or caricature of black womanhood. And indeed, more than one artist’s rendering of her (see figure 15) further exaggerated her image.76 One reporter described her as, “una mujer imponente,”

*La exuberante figura morena de Rosa Luna, la misma que año a año hace vibrar a decenas de miles de uruguayos a su paso por las calles de Montevideo reviviendo la magia y el encanto que son parte intrínseca de los uruguayos todos.*

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76 We can assume that Rosa Luna approved of these images since they appear in her autobiography.
(The exuberant black figure of Rosa Luna, the same one who year after year causes the vibration of tens of thousands Uruguayans when she walks by the streets of Montevideo, reliving the magic and the enchantment that is an intrinsic part of all Uruguayans.)

(report reproduced in Luna, 1988b, p. 90).

Some found Rosa Luna’s performance distasteful. In one of the many eulogizing comments contained in Pierri’s biography, Eduardo Freda admits that he was never taken by Rosa Luna, the dancer:

_A mí no me importa tanto como artista. ..Quizás no me gusta recordarla como la vedette que fue, atravesando 18 semidesnuda, y me gusta tenerla como esa otra mujer que fue llena de compasión y de ternura, como esa amiga que supo ser siempre.

(I do not care for her much as an artist…Maybe I don’t want to remember her as the vedette she was, parading half-naked down 18 [a major avenue]. I would like to remember her as that other woman, who was full of compassion and tenderness, as that friend that she always knew how to be.)

(Eduardo Freda in Pierri, 1994, p. 117)

The tenderness and compassion that Freda describes was not separate from her performance. Rosa Luna was not “merely” a statuesque, semi-nude, warrior-like dancer. An oft-repeated memory is that of the vedette kissing the children who surrounded her adoringly. Parents often encouraged their children to approach Rosa Luna and receive her tender touch.

During performance, Rosa Luna clearly embodied the stereotype of hypersexuality associated with black femininity. Predictably she was often portrayed as having an aggressive sexuality and lacking inhibitions. Through the media, she gained a reputation for being sexually voracious, “a man-eater.” In her autobiography, Rosa Luna positions herself as shy and a victim of malicious rumours:

_En esa etapa de muchos elogios y repetidos aplausos, la prensa me titulaba Diosa de Ebano, Mito Viviente, Vedette del Asfalto, Reina Africana, Alma del Carnaval, etc, y cubrían sus páginas con mi nombre. Las comparaciones odiosas de siempre con fines previsibles me llevaron a no golpear nunca sus puertas. Muchos periodistas, hoy de gran fama, hicieron sus primeras armas reporteándome. Creían encontrar a una muchacha sin inhibiciones, devoradora de hombres y hallaban la timidez alarmante, los gestos humildes y el miedo que cerraba mi garganta ante el micrófono o el lápiz._
(In that period of much praise and applause, the press named me the “Ebony Goddess,” “Living Myth,” “Vedette of the Asphalt,” “African Queen,” “Soul of Carnival,” etc., and they covered their pages with my name. The hateful comparisons with predictable ends, led me to stay away from knocking on their doors. Many journalists, who are renowned today, began their careers reporting on me. They believed they were facing a woman without inhibitions, a devourer of men, and instead they found an alarming shyness, humble gestures, and the fear that would make my throat close up before the microphone and the pen.)

(Luna, 1988, p. 31)

In any case, there is no question that her performance calls up dominant ideas about black women’s bodies. What is more intriguing, however, is that alongside the image of the over-sexed woman, exists the tenderness and nurturance remembered by Freda. In the next section, I explore these responses and others.

Reception of the Performance

(As the program wore on, the audience’s anxiety over seeing the central figure of the evening on the stage was growing. It all culminated in a spectacular way when the drums “called” from the back of the room, on the backs of the spectators, and in their midst appeared the exuberant black figure of Rosa Luna, the same one who, year after year, makes tens of thousands of Uruguayans vibrate as she passes by them in the streets of Montevideo. They relived the magic and the spell that is an intrinsic part of all Uruguayans.

The tremendous entrance, and her sensual circling of the dance-floor and the stage immediately won over all those present, and they became infected with the
rhythm and the spell of the drums. Some stood up and others were moving in their seats. The only thing that was for real, the only certainty, is that Rosa won over – as is her custom – the thirteen hundred people who went to reunite with her.

In short, the show was worth it. Rosa Luna fulfilled all expectations; she more than fulfilled them."

(account from El Español, December 2, 1986 as reprinted in Luna, 1988b, p. 90)

*Fue una estrella que seguirá brillando permanentemente, una de esas figuras inborrables que el pueblo ha logrado elegir y querer. Fue nuestra máxima vedette en el candombe. Junto a esas cualidades que tenía como profesional era una mujer de una sencillez y una gran sensibilidad, que ofrecía ese cariño que el pueblo supo reconocer generosamente y sentir. Al irse se fue con ella un pedazo de algo muy querido para todos nosotros.*

(She was a star who will keep shining permanently, one of those unforgettable figures that the people have managed to select and love. She was our top candombe vedette. In addition to her qualities as a professional, she was a simple woman with a great sensibility. She offered her affection towards the people, and the people knowingly and generously recognized it and felt it. With her passing, she has taken with her a piece of something that is very much loved by all of us.)

(Eduardo D'Angelo in Pierri, 1994, p. 118)

In this section, I turn to the audience’s response to Rosa Luna. Most of the comments I examine are taken from Pierri’s biography (described above). Written after her death, the comments are written in the spirit of eulogizing a legend who is beyond the realm of critique. As with any performer, there are varied responses from different people, but the range of comments reveal that this woman mobilized sentiments that go beyond a simple reading of her as a sex symbol. Those who were fans of Rosa Luna remember her for her charismatic personality, her tenderness, her intelligence, and her ability to reach “the people,” as well as her sensuality. Some of course remark upon her “tremendous physique.” Many feel that there was something about her unique personality that shone through her performance and made her into an icon. Moreover, these accounts highlight that what they remember about Rosa Luna is how she made them feel. Below I reproduce quite a few of these comments and recollections, because they encapsulate the range of feelings that Rosa Luna provoked. In combining remarks about Rosa Luna, the person and the performer, I am acknowledging the fact that as a public persona, she was
often “in character.” From Rosa Luna’s autobiography and columns, it is apparent that she actively worked on her public image.

Es el símbolo de nuestro Carnaval. Una mujer inteligente, que poseía un carisma muy especial, que uno apreciaba a poco de tratarla, que se instalaba entre ella y a quien distinguía con su amistad…

(She is the symbol of our Carnival. [she was] an intelligent woman, who possessed such a special charisma. One only had to approach her to appreciate it, and which was installed between her and whoever was distinguished by her friendship…)

(Ricardo Espalter in Pierri, 1994, p. 115)

…admiration porque a la par de todas las virtudes que como símbolo de baile tenía, como artista estaba el otro, el ser humano excelente que era. Era un ser capaz de despertar sensaciones maternales…Será recordada siempre y con gran cariño.

(…admiration, because in addition to all the virtues she had as a dance symbol, and the ones as an artist, she was an excellent human being. She was capable of awakening maternal sensations…She will always be remembered with great affection.)

(Ximena in Pierri, 1994, p. 116)

Tuve ocasión de trabajar varias veces con ella y entonces me atrevo a sostener que era un ser humano dotado de una dulzura, de una inocencia que te conquistaban…Es una grande, porque lo seguirá siendo eternamente.

(I had the occasion of working many times with her and therefore I take the liberty of asserting that she was a human being who was equipped with such sweetness, such an innocence that they won you over…She was a big one, and she will remain so eternally.)

(Petru Valensky in Pierri, 1994, p. 115)

Respetuosa, profesional al máximo. Para mí fue uno de esos seres que siempre vivió en apogeo, con esa dulzura tan de ella pero a su vez con la garra de llevar el Carnaval adentro. Rosa dejó la semilla porque ahora están apareciendo muchas figuras nuevas que la tienen a ella como ejemplo, como meta, pero, sin duda, como Rosa no habrá otra.

(He exhibited the utmost respect and professionalism. To me, she was one of those beings who always lived in her prime, with that sweetness that was so hers, but at the same time with the fighting spirit to carry the Carnival within her. Rosa left a seed because today there are many new figures appearing, who have her as an example, as a goal, but, undoubtedly there will not be another Rosa Luna.)
Como artista fue la imagen de la ternura y de la alegría. Una excelente compañera. A los afro-uruguayos les costó entrar en muchos lugares pero ella fue siempre un ejemplo en el plano social, un verdadero paladín para darse el sitio que le correspondía y al que muchos no llegaron con más carpeta que ella. Fue elegante y murió siéndolo. Una mujer mil por mil. No sólo reconocida en el Uruguay sino también en el extranjero. Fue sin duda un pedazo de nuestra cultura, añorada y reclamada por los uruguayos en todo el mundo. Me acuerdo en este momento de cuando ella entraba en la avenida y su sola presencia servía para coparla. ¡Que mujer!

(Fuente: José Bargas in Pierri, 1994, p. 122)

Fue una mujer del pueblo, que se dio por entero a su raza y el candombe.
(Alba Roballo in Pierri, 1994, p. 166)

Rosa Luna vibró y lucho junto a su raza toda la vida en el marco de lo que fue su gran actividad artística en las comparsas lubolas.

Sin duda será una mujer que nadie podrá olvidar cuando se hable del candombe.

(Ramón Cabrero in Pierri, 1994 pp. 163-64)

The following comments, also found in Pierri, come from telephone survey done by the newspaper, *La República*, following Rosa Luna’s death:

No hay manera, creo que no hay quien la sustituya a nivel artístico. Ella se imponía, desde su sola presencia.

(Jaime Muñoz in Pierri, 1994, p. 122)
(There is no way; I don’t think there is anyone who can substitute her at the artistic level. She was imposing, just with her mere presence.)
(anonymous in Pierri, 1994, p. 191)

_Era una mujer muy querida por todo el mundo._

(She was a woman that was loved by everyone.)
(anonymous in Pierri, 1994, p. 190)

_Todos los uruguayos la queríamos mucho._

(All of us Uruguayans loved her very much.)
(anonymous in Pierri, 1994, p. 190)

Summing up, Rosa Luna is remembered for her simplicity; sensitivity; affection; maternal disposition; intelligence; charisma; tremendous physique; astonishing breasts; devotion; responsibility. In addition she is remembered as “a piece of our culture;” “our vedette;” “a woman of the people.” Rosa Luna elicited plural responses that indicate her complex allure. The above appraisals connect Rosa Luna’s performance to her personality, and significantly, to the emotional realm. It is not so much about what she did as how she made people feel. She radiated warmth and tenderness. Her appeal was sexual; She made people “vibrate.” She possessed a “tremendous physique.” Her presence was “imponente” (imposing). Her appeal was also maternal: She gave of herself, she made people feel _loved_; and she _loved_ “the people.” In short, she was a maternal sex symbol.

I wonder whether Rosa Luna’s artistic feat was in performing herself as a formidable body that commanded attention to her sexuality, while at the same time eliciting feelings of affection. If she seemed maternal, than the audience were her children. The next section explores the idea that Rosa Luna’s performance called up the archetype of the black nursemaid/sexual slave by pursuing an analysis that brings together the “realms of psychoanalysis and social history” (McClintock, 1995b, p. 139).

**An Oedipal Scenario**

_La mágica figura de Rosa Luna está unida a mi niñez. No nací en el barrio Sur pero viví siempre muy cerca y para mi siempre resultó ser un personaje tremendo_
con aquel fisico que tenía, con aquellos pechos que me impresionaban como loco. Después, la vida me llevó a apreciarla profesionalmente y conoció su entrega, el amor por lo que hacía, su gran sentido de responsabilidad en su país y en un medio que no se caracteriza por ese rigor, por una conducta…

(The magic figure of Rosa Luna is united to my childhood. I was not born in barrio Sur, but I always lived nearby and for me she was always a tremendous figure, with that physique she had, with those breasts that drove me crazy. Later, life led me to appreciate her professionally and to get to know her devotion, her love for what she did, her great feeling for responsibility to her country and – in a field that is not well known for it – her rigor, her conduct…)

(Fernando Condon, in Pierri, pp. 122-23)

Fernando Condon’s recollection of Rosa Luna is one of the most effusive in Pierri’s book. He makes no apologies for his erotic feelings, which read almost like an Oedipal tale. Condon, the child, is attracted to the “tremendous” physique and fascinated by the breasts of this maternal figure. Later in life, he has the opportunity to get to know Rosa Luna better and he admires not her body, but her sense of responsibility and her professionalism. In the same passage, Condon voices a “tremendous” desire that he links to his childhood, not his adult, self.

Hugo Brocos was the director of a murga, a type of theatrical troupe that performs during Carnival. He recalls meeting Rosa Luna when his group was about to share a stage with her. Like Condon, Broco at first focuses on Rosa Luna’s body, then moves on to describe her admirable stamina and work ethic:

No eramos nadie y teníamos todos los nervios de los que debutan. Nosotros la seguimos en un escenario. Ella estaba con su gente. Nos ve nerviosos, pensando en el público y se acerca. Se descubre uno de aquellos pechos fenomenales que tenía y nos muestra un surco rojo, en carne viva, que le había hecho en la parte del sostén. Después subió al escenario y se movió y actuó como si no le doliera, como si no le pasara nada. Para mí no murió, simplemente no está. Una mujer amorosa con los gurises; había que verla. Ella era negra y le daba besos a los blancos, con ese amor, con esa ternura que tenía, que hacía que toda la gurisada, estuviera donde estuviera, la rodera."

(We were nobodies and we had the nerves of those who are just debuting. We were following her act on stage. She was with her people [her comparsa]. She saw us looking nervous, thinking about the audience, and she approached us. She uncovered one of her phenomenal breasts and she showed us a red groove carved into her skin, raw flesh that had been imprinted by her brassiere. Then she got up...
on the stage, she moved and she performed as if it didn’t hurt, as if there was nothing wrong. To me, she did not die. She simply isn’t here. A woman who was affectionate with the kids; you had to see her. She was black and she kissed all the whites, with that love, with that tenderness she had, which made the whole [mob/bunch ?] of kids circle her, wherever she was.

(Hugo Brocos in Pierri, 1994, p. 121)

In Brocos’ poignant memory, Rosa Luna uncovers her breast – showing her pain – to impart some of her courage upon the young (mostly white) men waiting in the wings. Even in her role as statuesque sex-pot, Rosa Luna is maternal, tender, and sweet. Intriguingly, both Condon and Brocos express “infantile” longings that distance them from the adult desire for black femininity. Brocos initially admires Rosa Luna’s flesh, feeling the need to describe her “phenomenal breasts.” Then, he displaces the desire onto the children. As mentioned earlier, Rosa Luna was often linked to adoring children. Both men also make an association between the black maternal figure and self-sacrifice.

Rosa Luna’s performance and its reception call for a historically-informed psychoanalytic reading. Specifically, I want to focus on the oedipal aspects of Brocos’ and Condon’s stories to argue that Rosa Luna’s performance is provocative because it both evokes and contradicts the symbolic order. I am calling these “oedipal” tales because they contain two important elements of the Oedipus complex; 1) the desire for the mother; and 2) the disavowal of that desire. I will briefly recap some pertinent elements of this stage (also described in chapter two). The Oedipus Complex, as theorized by Sigmund Freud (1961), refers to a stage in a child’s psychic development, which is said to be critical for gender identification. Based primarily around the male psyche, this stage is said to be precipitated by a “primal scene,” that involves the witnessing of a sexual act and the boy’s realization of woman’s passivity (lack of a penis) (Bergner, 2005, p. xix). According to Freud, the young boy is initially in love, and identifies, with the mother. Discovering the mother’s “lack” and the father’s dominance is said to propel castration anxiety. For Freud, this process is proved by, and explains, the incest taboo that is common to many cultures. Once the crisis is resolved it results in normative gender identification, wards off incest, and realigns desire. For Lacan, the oedipal stage is preceded by the mirror stage when the child encounters his reflected image and begins to develop a notion of a unified self. The oedipal stage is then reframed as a metaphoric process by which the child learns that the “Law of the Father” supercedes
the desire of the mother. Bergner notes that, like Freud, Lacan “posits a visual event as critical for subject formation” (Bergner, 2005, p. xviii). She uses the term “specular moments” more generally to refer to “dramatic representations of critical phases in the formation of subjectivity” (Bergner, 2005, p. xix). Feminist scholars have critiqued psychoanalytic accounts of identity development for their masculinist focus (see Gallop, 1987; Irigaray, 1985; Lauretis, 1994) and for lack of attention to the class and racial dynamics of subject development (Bergner, 1995, 2005; Mohanram, 1999; Nast, 2000).

Despite these limitations, some theorists have found it useful to both critique and revise the Oedipus complex to think about how desires are formed within and reflect the symbolic order, which is implicit in the “socio-political sphere” (Bergner, xviii). Following Lacan, Bergner (2005, p. 28) posits that if we think of the Oedipus complex as “not the very specific story of a boy’s erotic demand for his mother and sexual rivalry with his father, but a child’s general internalization and projection of desire, authority, aggressivity, and identification,” it becomes possible to excavate the relation between power and desire. As I mentioned in chapter two, Lacan theorizes that the oedipal stage signals the child’s entrance into the symbolic order and language.

For Lacan, the Oedipus complex does not describe the universal content of unconscious desire, but rather the structure that produces it: a “symbolic constellation underlying the unconscious of the subject,” which causes the desire that must always be newly discovered in each case. For Lacan, Freud’s Oedipus complex signifies a crucial metaphor for the West’s symbolic order.

(Bergner, 26)

Bergner’s (2005, p. xviii) project is to “complicate” Lacanian and Freudian readings of subject formation by putting them into conversation with paradigmatic texts of black subjectivity. These include Frederick Douglass’s (1982) *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, Toni Morrison’s (1987) *Beloved*, and Frantz Fanon’s (1967) *Black Skin, White Masks*. Bergner (2005, p. xxviii) notes that *Black Skin, White Masks* was one of the first works to use psychoanalysis to “writ[e] a socially contextualized paradigm that accounts for the ways that power, economics, gender, and nationalism construct a racial identity.” She extends Fanon’s critique of the colonial racial legacy through a study which – unlike Fanon – attends to the entanglement of

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77 In doing so, Bergner builds upon Lacan’s, Fanon’s, and Silverman’s correctives to Freud (see Bergner, 2005, introduction pp. xiii-xxxii).
gender with race in the negotiation of the symbolic order. She begins by noting that there are “‘stock scenes’ of double consciousness” within several key American texts on black subjectivity, which parallel the “primal scenes” or “specular moments” in psychoanalytic theory (Bergner, 2005, p. xxxi). Like the oedipal scene (in Freud) or the infant’s reflection (in Lacan), these moments trigger a crisis that incites a shift in identity, an induction into the racial/sexual symbolic order.

As an example, Bergner refers to a critical passage from Douglass’s *Narrative*. Douglass recounts the trauma of witnessing the whipping of his aunt, Hester, by the slave-owner. This is the moment when he realizes that a slave cannot really be a man. Bergner (2005, p. 33) notes that Douglass’ narrative “anticipates” the oedipal storyline. It is a visual memory featuring the aggressive father (the slave-owner), the passive mother (the aunt), and the traumatized son (himself). This moment also signals a shift in Douglass’s apprehension of where he fits in the racial/gendered order: “The whipping scene functions like a primal scene that triggers Douglass’ ‘recognition’ of racial difference from within the matrix of slavery’s ‘family’” (Bergner, 2005, p. 34). Bergner notes that this passage shows at least an implicit awareness of the ways that race and sex are intertwined:

> In the whipping scene, not only does the father figure represent the Law and the mother figure represent castration, but slavery and femininity seem to correspond, as do freedom and masculinity. The aunt’s powerlessness before the master mirrors the mother’s castration relative to paternal Law….Although this scene’s sexual content involves Hester’s gender, it also implicates her race and status as a slave. As in Freud’s account Douglass discovers “lack” in Hester’s body. However, Douglass clarifies better than Freud that the interpretation of sexual difference and lack derives from social context and its tyrannies. (Bergner, 2005, p. 34)

For Bergner (2005, p. 41), this passage signals Douglass’ awakening to his racial condition and shows how he at once “subverts” and buys into “myths about masculinity.” For a black man to claim “American citizenship” necessitates “rewriting” his positioning with respect to the symbolic order (Bergner, 2005, p. 41). As the same passage indicates, however, Douglass must distance himself from feminine “passivity” in the process.

The key insight I take from Bergner is that we need to consider the ways that the symbolic order is installed and apprehended in more diverse sites and moments than
those proposed by traditional psychoanalysis. There may be other “primal scenes” or “specular moments” and these may not always occur in “family” settings, or solely in childhood. In fact, my interpretation of Bergner is that interpellation into the symbolic order is ongoing, but it is narrated or remembered through key “specular moments.” These moments, then, offer clues to understand to process of subject formation in relation to categories such as race, gender, and class.

I am extending Bergner’s analysis to argue that the public performance black femininity, such as the vedette’s, has a role in the apprehension of the symbolic order. The evidence comes from the effusive responses to Rosa Luna. As I have already mentioned, this performer constitutes a maternal figure who elicits desire, a desire which is crystallized in Brocos’ and Condon’s narratives. In these two men’s accounts, we also see the ambivalence or anxiety provoked by the desire, again echoing the crises fomented by the “primal scenes” of psychoanalysis. We see the compulsion to disavow or displace the desire for the “black mother.”

My analysis is further bolstered by Heidi Nast (2000), who looks at the ongoing symbolic and spatial significance of black bodies and desire within societies with a history of slavery. She also deploys, and critiques, Freudian psychoanalytic theory. Specifically, she faults classic psychoanalysis for failing to recognize the critical role of race and class in the formation of gendered identities. Nast is concerned with showing the racial and spatial origins of the “oedipal family.” She sets out to show that “unconscious” desires stem from, and inform, the social order. Nast begins by noting that societies with a history of slavery and black domesticity generated Oedipal desires for the “black maternal” (she is drawing on Carby, 1986; J. D. Hall, 1983; Hill-Collins, 1990). Given black slave women’s role as wet nurses and caregivers she insists that we need to attend to “the symbolic and practical importance of slave women’s bodies to white men in early childhood and their prominent place in the libidinization of white male desire” (Nast, 2000, p. 216). According to Nast, this intimate and unequal relationship resulted in desires that – although frequently acted upon – were also repressed. Once the white child reached adolescence, his initial love for the maternal figure (the black mammy) had to be disavowed. The young male had to learn to identify that proper motherhood and
wifehood were linked to whiteness, not the blackness of the woman who had mothered him.

This did not indicate, however, that the desire for black femininity disappeared. Nast argues that the desire and its repression are evident in violent acts such as the control over where black people lived and the rape of black women. The sexual exploitation of enslaved women was prevalent through the continent, as has already been noted. Also widespread was the simultaneous portrayal of black women as sexual predators (Browning, 1995; Hill Collins 1990; Nast, 2000; Roberts, 1994; Silva, 1998). These historical desires and the accompanying violence do not disappear with the end of slavery, but continue to shape social relations. This was already evident in the discussion of how black women are positioned vis-à-vis the Brazilian nation (Silva, 1998).

According to Nast, repressed desires born of violent histories also inform spatial arrangements. In the post-abolition US, she argues that segregation was informed by repressed desires for blackness and fear of the “black rapist.” The white desire for blackness was displaced onto the young black male, who was cast as a threat to the purity of the “white mother” (Nast, 2000, p. 227). Nast describes an oedipal scenario where hierarchy works through the symbols of the “white mother,” the “black son,” and the “white father.” For Nast (2000, p. 227), it is not incidental that lynchings involved the sexual mutilation of black men: “Black men, historically infantilized as ‘sons,’ were well positioned psychically to carry a symbolic burden of incest, a sin punishable by castration and/or death.” Again, Nast points out that the displacement of desire had geographic and violent repercussions:

The unconscious production of black "boys" as carriers of unconscious (unspoken, for- bidden) desires for the (symbolically white) mother was arguably widespread and provided the moral and psychical impetus for creating numerous colonial segregationary practices at many spatial scales. Accordingly, the primary motivating factor for segregation has been voiced anxiously in terms of white women (po- sitioned symbolically and "unconsciously" as an object of incestuous desire) in danger. Precisely through mobilizing and cordon off black bodies and spaces away from the white mater- nal, the symbolically burdened black male body was and is prepared for exploitation.

(Nast, 2000, p. 216)

Following Bergner and Nast, the “nuclear” family scenario posited by Freud is not sufficient for theorizing subject formation within a social order that is racialized, as well
as gendered. Furthermore, Nast draws attention to the spatiality of desire. I now pursue the argument that Rosa Luna’s performance, at least in some instances, acted as a “specular moment,” which “awakened” and also disturbed the symbolic order through a performance that mobilized and re-spatialized historical desires.

In performance, Rosa Luna embodied the stereotype of black woman’s aggressive sexuality. Simultaneously, she displayed a maternal side. Perhaps Rosa Luna, through her complex performance of maternity and sexuality, drew some audience members into the familiar scenario of the black nursemaid. Here it is useful to turn to performance theory. Taylor (2003) defines a scenario as a familiar structure, which informs the audience’s interpretation of a performance:

The scenario structures our understanding. It haunts our present, a form of hauntology…that resuscitates and reactivates old dramas. We’ve seen it all before. The framework allows for occlusions; by positioning our perspective, it promotes certain views while helping to disappear others.

(D. Taylor, 2003, p. 28)

Brocos’ and Condon’s narratives make me wonder to what extent Rosa Luna activated – at least for some audience members “unconscious desires.” Nast (2000, p. 242-243) uses “the word ‘unconscious’ to connotate a kind of blinding of oneself to the ways in which the body and desire speaks itself through practice, ritual, and performance (the imaginary), rather than solely through language and the spoken.”

I am proposing that the national romance with Rosa Luna speaks of the “old drama” of the black maternal/black nursemaid. Part of the scenario involves the disavowal of desire for blackness and its projection onto the children, visible in the above quotes. The desire for black femininity seems to be speakable only when it is projected onto children. As in the previous chapter, desire and disavowal anxiously co-exist. The fear of engulfment is also palpable; the superlative descriptions of Rosa Luna’s body, “those breasts that drove me crazy” and “her tremendous physique” resonate with engulfment anxiety. A popular singer intimates the desire and disavowal aroused by Rosa Luna: Cuando baila Rosa Luna/tiembra su piel de aceituna/Y la guitarra moruna/le entrega un hijo al tambor/Y el parche de su cintura/refugio de mil ternura/lo vuelve loco al cantor (When Rosa Luna dances/her olive skin trembles/And the Moorish guitar surrenders a child to the drums/And the area of her waist/the refugee of a thousand
caresses/drives the singer insane). The singer is threatened by the loss of control posed by merging with the dancer’s body.

The scenario enacted by Rosa Luna embodies the contradictory relationships that followed from slavery and white supremacy. Nast (246) notes that “colonial desires were racistically libidinized and made familial.” The intimate, family-like constellation of the slave/master arrangement blurred, but did not erase, its violent underpinnings. The mammy cared for white children, but under coercion. In the more contemporary “domestication” of blackness described in chapter three, we saw that power continues to work through a “familiar” arrangement in the employer/domestic relations.

Mae Henderson (2003, p. 107) reminds us of Richard Dyer’s observation that “performers get to be stars when what they act out matters to enough people” (Dyer, 2004, p. 17). Rosa Luna’s act mattered so much that she rose from the conventillo to national prominence. Without discounting Rosa Luna’s talent, I am proposing that her performance was compelling because of the ways it connected with the symbolic order and unspoken desires. I am not suggesting that these specific men had black nannies or maids in their childhoods. I am proposing that seeing a black woman embodying “her place” as a maternal sex symbol produced resonances with the symbolic order. Furthermore, the national romance with Rosa Luna may signal the need to be loved by the “black maternal.” Whiteness depends on a notion of innocence for its self-definition (Farley, 1997). Following Farley (1997, p. 502), “the racialist wants to believe that his race-pleasure is not a product of power relationship, that is, he wants to believe that he is not ‘taking’ and the Others are not ‘giving.’” Perhaps the vedette’s performance momentarily fulfilled the fantasy to be unconditionally loved by the black nursemaid. “She was black and she kissed all the whites, with that love, with that tenderness she had” (Brocos, in Pierri, 1994, p. 121). I read Rosa Luna’s embrace by the nation as linked to the elision of what she embodied: historical and ongoing race, class, and gendered oppressions. Again we see evidence of “a psychological dependence upon precisely those Others which are being rigorously opposed and excluded at the social level” (Stallybrass & White, 1986, p. 5). My argument must be read together with the previous chapter’s

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78 This is a verse from Horacio Guarani’s song entitled Rosa Luna (1987) reproduced on the back cover of Rosa Luna’s autobiography (1988b).
examination of Páez Vilaró. Páez Vilaró’s erotically charged encounter with the conventillo, is produced within the same national space, where Rosa Luna is adored and held up as a national icon. And, just as Rosa Luna embodies the conventillo, the conventillo embodies the eroticized blackness associated with black femininity. Therefore national belonging, which is dependent upon whiteness, is negotiated via an embodiment that is largely excluded from the national ideal of citizenship. After all, Rosa Luna – and the other vedettes – do not fit the ideal of white femininity that defines the reproducers of the nation, as envisioned in the national narrative (Townsend-Bell, 2007).

Crucially, I do not believe that Rosa Luna, or the vedette figure in general, simply echoes the symbolic/social order. I believe that the performance produces dissonances as well, adding to the drama, the anxiety, and the desire. The vedette is not like the maid, who is confined to the domestic sphere. She is not like the “passive” mother, spied upon by the curious child. Her presence is strong and aggressive. The vedette commands attention to her body, her race, and her sexuality. She is not “discovered;” she performs in a highly public and highly visible space, where she is the center of attention. If this is a drama, she is a powerful actor who directs the gaze. She is the black maternal symbol, who exercises agency within the limited conditions under which her body can be apprehended. Thus, the vedette remaps the spatial coordinates of the symbolic order. As discussed in chapter three, the dominant order attempts to confine black femininity to the domestic realm. Rosa Luna, a woman who started out as a maid herself, takes this embodiment “public.” The woman who might embody the maid/sexual prey is no longer in the bourgeois home, no longer in the kitchen, and no longer tending to the clotheslines, and the children. She travels abroad to be received by the adoring masses. Some of the attempts to signify Rosa Luna as a “black mother” perhaps reveal the tensions caused by a black woman in a public space.

Here I see parallels between Rosa Luna’s performance and the “self-objectifying” carnival performances studied by Aching (2002, p. 25). He theorizes that agency and resistance operate through carnival performances, through “masking” and “demasking.” Aching illustrates the idea with the example of black men who paraded in a 19th-century West Indian carnival painted with black varnish (Aching, 2002, p. 16-17). In analyzing a traveller’s reaction to the sight, Aching discusses how these performers both emphasized
and denaturalized their difference producing a moment of “demasking” for the viewer. Demasking, in this context, means to reveal the viewer’s complicity in constituting the objectified subject:

[D]emasking may be understood as an unexpected and undesirable ideological self-recognition (the shock of self recognition) that is brought on by contact with a masked subject. As opposed to the term “unmasking,” which tends to be laden with the meaning that the mask is removed from someone else, I choose “demasking” in order to lay emphasis on the action of literally or figuratively removing an ideological mask from oneself or someone else in encounters and confrontations between masked subjects and viewing subjects. As such, “demasking” provides greater maneuverability for examining not just how the masked subject’s identity and/or consciousness is revealed, but also the ways in which the viewing subject comes to an awareness of his or her ideological position vis-à-vis the masked subject.

(Aching, 2002, p. 6, author’s original emphasis)

For Aching a “self-objectifying” act is not “debilitating but reaffirmative,” because the objectified begins to expose the “ideological position” of the audience member. Aching’s observations are relevant to Rosa Luna’s performance, where we see an exaggerated, “self-objectifying” black femininity. By exposing her body, Rosa Luna was (intentionally or not) revealing the nation’s repressed desire for an archetypal black femininity.

Next, I turn to a discussion of whether Rosa Luna’s performance can be framed as a reification of, or resistance to, the dominant racial/sexual order.

**Rosa Luna’s Performance: Reification or Resistance?**

Black women writers and performers have had little choice but to engage with and negotiate the representations of the Mammy and other colonial and sociological images of black women, whether they like it or not.

(Ford-Smith, 2005, p. 155)

*Rosa la que no tuvo miedo ni a la sociedad que le reservó un lugar de “vedette,” y ella demostró que además de ser la mejor, su cabeza estaba metida en la realidad social de nuestro pueblo…*

(Rosa was not afraid of the society that had reserved for her the role of “vedette” and she demonstrated that in addition to being the best, her head was inserted in the social reality of our people…)

(Romero Rodriguez in Pierri, 1994, p. 193)
Given that Rosa Luna ostensibly performed a stereotype of black femininity, an inevitable question comes up: “Is she a ventriloquist for the dominant or a subaltern who speaks?” (Ford-Smith, 2005, p. 154). To approach this question, I want to turn to three theorists, who think about the complexity of other performances of black femininity: Ford-Smith’s (2005) analysis of Jamaica’s Miss Lou, Henderson’s (2003) analysis of Josephine Baker, and Philip’s (1997) analysis of Trinidad’s jamettes.

Miss Lou (aka Louise Simone Bennett) was a nationally renowned and loved Jamaican actress and poet. She was well known for her comic sketches, performed in a costume reminiscent of the “mammy” or Aunt Jemima. While her performance could be superficially read as reinscribing colonial scripts, Ford-Smith (2005, p. 155) convincingly argues that Bennett “literally re-possessed the stereotype with her own body and created a performative mythology of nation based on the productive and transformative use of this figure.” As she elaborates:

Louise Bennett used the tactic of deploying covert signs of resistance, but she did so while appearing to collude with dominant discourses on black women. In an extremely agile way, she made the ambivalence of conflicting messages productive by inhabiting the simultaneity of the subversive and domesticated, writing and speech, pathos and satire, respectfulness and trickery. Her tremendous popularity as a performer lay in her ability to perform this ambivalence in the figure she created.

(Ford-Smith, 2005, p. 172)

Ford-Smith contends that Bennett drew authority by performing in a recognizable role, but she also subverted it, thus opening up a space from which to speak. Furthermore, she finds that by speaking a subversive message through a familiar figure, Bennett caused a rupture turning the “stereotype against itself” and making “working class black women active public and cultural figures essential to the notion of the community” (Ford-Smith, 2005, p. 186).

I am not claiming a similar intentional subversion in Rosa Luna’s performance. I have not seen any data that would support such an argument. Publicly, she reveled in her femininity. For instance, in her autobiography she takes pleasure in the fact that she “drove men crazy” (Luna, 1988b, p. 29). Regardless, the conditions under which she could perform and be perceived as an icon were culturally and socially contingent, exposing the inherent tensions of black woman’s embodiment.
Initially, she came to dance as a way “out” of the *conventillo*. In an interview, Beatriz Santos expresses this view:

*Bueno, es evidente que la forma de llegar a ser significativo en esta sociedad [para los afro-uruguayos], las puertas siempre fueron a través del deporte o del arte.”* 

(Well, it’s evident that the way [for Afro-Uruguayans] to reach a significant place in society, the doors have always been exclusively through sports or the arts)

(Beatriz Santos, personal communication)

Furthermore, Rosa Luna’s performance cannot be taken up in just one way. Ford-Smith highlights that we need to consider that performances may mean different things to different audiences: “Actions or making stories about people have to be proposed, accepted, rejected and transformed in a public space” (Ford-Smith, 2005, pp. 59-60).

While some may have perceived Rosa Luna as the embodiment of a fantasy, her public visibility was also a resistance. When images of blackness are scarce, and beauty is associated with whiteness, the celebration of black femininity can be empowering (Barnes, 1997; Rahier, 1998). Comments from Afro-Uruguayan activists Néstor Silva, and Romero Rodríguez in Pierri (1994), as well as my interview with Beatriz Santos, reflect this view. I reproduce Rodríguez’s comments, while keeping in mind that Rosa Luna by no means inspired the same feelings in all Afro-Uruguayans:

*Rosa es uno de esos hermosos casos donde la dignificación del arte afrouruguayo ha sido el motor principal de su vida. Ella no sólo ha reivindicado el arte negro, como exponente de la cultura uruguaya, sin o que también la ha hecho conocer por varios países del mundo.*

(Rosa is one of those beautiful cases where dignifying Afro-Uruguayan art has been the principal motor of her own life. She has not only reclaimed black art; as an exponent of Uruguayan culture, she has also let it be known in various countries in the world.

(Romero Rodríguez, in Pierri, 1994, p.192)

Rather than viewing it as either “ventriloquism” or resistance, Rosa Luna’s performance embodied the tensions that constructed her positioning as an Afro-Uruguayan woman. Here Rosa Luna joins other performers of black femininity. I am specifically thinking of Josephine Baker, who some see as an influence on the vedette
Henderson (2003) understands Baker’s performance of the semi-nude “primitive,” as both satisfying the desire for colonial spectacle, as well as subverting it.

Baker’s performances enacted events in which both the audience and performer participated, the former compelled by a powerful voyeurism coupled by the latter’s equally powerful exhibitionism—a dialectical performance reenacting the obsessive need of the colonizer to “look” and the obsessive desire of the colonized to be “looked at."

(Henderson, 2003, p. 108)

Baker famously appeared in Paris cabarets, dressed in feathers and little else, performing an exaggerated version of the “African” that resonated with Parisians, who had not long before enjoyed the spectacle of caged “natives” at international expositions. Henderson (2003, p. 108) argues that Baker captured the imagination of this public by “becoming the site of the uncharted terrain to be explored, tamed, and conquered each evening.” She became the primitive black female body that they flocked to see in the fairs, deconstructing the primitive by performing it.

Rosa Luna, like Baker, faced head on an image with which black women – North and South – contend. Both women knew that they bodies would be read in certain ways. If Rosa Luna was to become a performer, she had to tackle the sense that “the meaning [of her body] was already there, pre-existing, waiting for [her].” (Fanon, 1967, p.134). In aggressively presenting herself as a sexual object, Rosa Luna pre-empted what others could project upon her.

I end this section by reflecting upon the Port of Spain’s jamettes. Jamettes were “loose women,” perhaps prostitutes, who performed “lewd” acts such as lifting up their skirts during carnival. Philip (1997) proposes that these black, working-class women were resisting by drawing attention to the commodification of their sexuality. They risked both ridicule and jail time. Philip understands the jamettes as reclaiming “dis place, between the legs” through their public performance. The following is an excerpt from one of Philip’s poems about the jamettes:

De space between we legs is we own to do with as we please, and we not frighten of these streets. Dese streets is we own – we have a right to be here and we bating any man who telling we different – just ask Cutway Rimbeau!

(Philip, 1997, p. 82)

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79 In the 1950s, Vilaró took Josephine Baker to visit Medio Mundo when she was in Montevideo.
The jamettes do not give a damn about respectability. “Dis place,” the source of initial displacement for African-descended women, becomes the means for a momentary reterritorialization that emphasizes difference and perhaps the centrality of blackness within the national imagination. By taking their “private space” to a “public space” and throwing it in the face of authorities and respectable society, the jamettes and Rosa Luna claim a place.

**Conclusion**

The vedette’s occupation of public space is always temporary. Although Rosa Luna transcended the carnival, her career depended on it. She reflects in her book that her longevity was due to never having missed a carnival (Luna, 1988b). Wherever she was, she would return to Montevideo in February and pound the pavement in her high heels. Her “reign” as “Queen of the Asphalt” was fleeting and dependent upon her “flesh.” The fragility of the vedette is captured poignantly by Wilson Mesa:80

*Rosa de los morenos.*
*Rosa de los tambores.*
*Con pechos gigantescos de carbón y de bronce.*

*Rosa del carnaval.*
*Flor de los negros que tu raza plantara en el barrio Palermo.*
*Naciste hecha de bronce carbón y calle para alzarte absoluta, potente y frágil.*

*Frágil porque eres sólo flor de los carnavales, cuando Sur y Palermo levantan vuelo y se ponen encima los estandartes.*

---

80 Wilson Mesa (b. 1948) is a recognized Uruguayan short story and poetry writer, who offers a perceptive view of what Rosa Luna embodies. He received the María Eugenia Vaz Ferreira prize (2006) for an unpublished book of poems. This poem is found at http://www.elderechodigital.com/CULTURAL/datos027.html
Canción para Rosa Luna explores the “potent” and “fragile” positioning of the carnival vedette. Playing with the literal meaning of her name, “rose” and “moon,” the poem is not about Rosa Luna, it is directed towards her. Specifically, it is directed to the Rosa Luna of carnival, implying that there is another one besides the one with the “breasts of coal and bronze.” The “Rosa/Rose of the carnival” has been “raised” to great heights by the neighbourhood, just as she caused its uplift. The poet marks the temporal limits of her “reign.” She soars and becomes a flower only within during carnival. Moreover, he continues by noting the difficulty of her performance:

\[ Y \text{ entonces acometes} \]
\[ \text{la dura empresa} \]
\[ \text{de ser tú misma un estandarte} \]
\[ \text{de carne.} \]

Then you accomplish
the difficult task
of becoming a banner yourself
a banner of flesh.

Here Mesa foregrounds the corporeal limits of her performance and later notes that it will only last as long as her “black splendour endures.” The performance of the vedette may indicate strength, but it is also fleeting. Rosa Luna’s splendour outlasted her life; she died following an asthma attack during a performance in Toronto. The circumstances of her death tragically accentuated the vulnerability of becoming “a banner of flesh.”

Rosa Luna herself did not reflect on the limitations of her association with carnival, at least not publicly. It would have perhaps prejudiced her career. I want to turn to a reflection from Martha Gularte, the vedette who left the carnival, who speaks of how she was restricted by her “carnivalization.” Gularte was weary of how she was positioned within the carnival. In the introduction to her book of poetry, Gularte states that:

Si te digo la verdad.. no me gusta mucho el carnaval. Yo bailaba esos bailes raros, entonces ahí me mezclaron para el carnaval. Pero yo el candombe lo veo... un poco monótono.

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81 Rosa Luna had misgivings about the whole trip, but went ahead because she needed the income (Pierri, 1994). Her biographer Pierri (1994) believes that she did not receive proper medical treatment in Toronto.
The above statement attests, perhaps, to Gularte’s ongoing struggle for to gain respect as an artist and respectability as a black woman. Gularte insisted on her professional credentials and was dismayed at the fact that “any black woman who puts two feathers on her head is a vedette.” Admittedly, this may reveal a “snobbishness” on Gularte’s part. On the other hand, she may also be indicating that if “anyone” can be a vedette, than the vedette is not considered a “true” dancer:

I went out, fifty years ago, with scant clothing, because I was a dancer. I was a vedette. I was a vedette. And later, they kept calling them vedettes. Any black woman who put on two feathers on her head is a vedette. They misunderstand the word vedette. I was a vedette, because I sang in English, I danced tap, I danced to Cuban music, Brazilian music, I danced macumbas....So then, I had knowledge of dance.)

Gularte expresses that while *candombe* and cabaret dancing opened some doors for her, others had been shut. Despite wide recognition of her talents, she was never able to break the barrier into theatre: “*A mí me gustaba mucho el teatro. No tuve oportunidades…. Porque quería bailar y todo me llevaban a casas nocturnas a bailar.*” (I loved the theatre. But I did not have opportunities….I wanted to dance and they would take me to the night-clubs to dance”) (Ganduglia & Blezio, 1998, p. 42). When she tried to break into theatre, Gularte was turned off by expectations that she would perform nude. Gularte’s biggest break as an actress came in 2001, when she portrayed a brothel madam in *En la Puta Vida* (directed by Beatriz Flores Silva).

The next chapter takes one last look at the precarious positioning of the Afro-Uruguayan *conventillo* vis-à-vis the carnivalesque body and examines its implication in the evictions.
Chapter Six  
Conclusion: The Poetics and Politics of the Conventillo

El 3 de diciembre de 1978 sonaron especialmente los tambores en llamada” por última vez en el “Medio Mundo,” uno de los templos “fundamentales” del candombe. Ese día tuvo lugar esta manifestación y “llamada” en defensa de aquel legionario conventillo, condenado a la demolición por la dictadura militar que dispuso el desalojo forzado de sus habitantes, al igual que en el hermano conventillo de “Ansina” un mes después. Lo sucedido aquel día fue un acto espontáneo con mucho de homenaje de despedida a una de las cunas inspiradoras del candombe, de compromiso con su legado, y también con mucho de rechazo y resistencia a una arbitrariedad cargada del racismo de quienes sostenían que los negros y sus tambores empobrecían la ciudad, y no podían vivir en el centro de Montevideo perjudicando su particular atractivo turístico e inmobiliario.

(On December 3, 1978 the drums called out for the last time in “Medio Mundo,” one of the “fundamental” temples of candombe. That day there was a demonstration and a “call of the drums” in defense of that legendary conventillo, which was condemned for demolition by the military dictatorship, which forced the eviction of its residents, as with the residents of its twin conventillo Ansina, a month later. What happened that day was a spontaneous act that was both a homage and a farewell to one of the inspiring cradles of candombe. It was a commitment to its legacy, as well as a rejection of, and resistance to, the racist and arbitrary actions of those who held that the blacks and their drums impoverished the city, so they could not go on living in the centre of Montevideo, thereby damaging its tourism and real estate appeal.)

(Ortuño, 2006, Entre Colores)

Introduction: Summary of Findings

This thesis has investigated the symbolic place of the conventillo within the dominant Uruguayan imaginary. In general terms, I have shown that the “carnivalization” of the conventillo and its residents renders Afro-Uruguayans as less than belonging, while also enhancing the national identity through a “hint of blackness.” My objective has been to foreground the connections between the spatial, symbolic, and subjective aspects of citizenship and belonging. In this chapter, I recap the findings of the preceding chapters to show how this thesis contributes to race and citizenship studies by connecting theories of embodiment, geography, and belonging (McKittrick, 2000; Nelson, 2008; Radcliffe, 1990) to the theorization of geography and desire (Nast, 2000; Pile, 1996) and I point to
the further questions opened up by this work. I then conclude by juxtaposing two narratives of the evictions that further draw out the connections between the politics and the poetics of the conventillo.

In the introduction, I began by posing the following questions in order to understand why the Afro-Uruguayan conventillo looms large in the national imagination:

- What are the meanings attached to the Afro-Uruguayan conventillo?
- How does the conventillo make meaning?
- How do people come to know themselves through this site?

I established that the conventillo is folklorized, through picturesque portrayals of colourful clotheslines, “dancing subalterns,” and sexualized women. This dynamic was made visible in chapter three, which showed that conventillo women – and those who embodied the conventillo – were positioned precariously with respect to national belonging. First, their class, race, gender, and practices marked them as less than the national ideal of womanhood (white, middle-class, chaste) as prescribed in popular magazines and other media. Secondly, they were haunted by popular constructions of conventillo women as quarrelsome and immoral, and the historical and ongoing “domestication” of blackness. They were seen as “natural” laundresses and prostitutes. I repeat Gularte’s observation: “They loved putting maid’s uniforms on us, the black girls.” Furthermore, I argued that the “domestication of blackness” was constitutive of respectable, white femininity. Thus this chapter began to show how the conventillo-as-imagined informs the experiences of subjects who are seen to embody the conventillo.

This study shows, however, that black spaces and black people are not “simply” excluded and distanced from the nation; they are crucial to constituting subjectivities and belonging. In fact, I argued that it is the inherent ambiguity of racial boundaries that leads to the fetishization of the conventillo as a racial marker. This process was made evident in chapter four, through an examination of the autobiographical writings and paintings of an artist who has been influential in constituting the representational space of the conventillo (Carlos Páez Viláró). The subject in Páez Vilaró (2000) traces a “journey into negritude” (aka Medio Mundo) a journey that, I argue, attempts to map the boundaries between
blackness and whiteness. This investigation allowed for a deeper look at how the folklorization of the conventillo is connected to the psychodynamics of place and the negotiation of white masculinity. The white male subject is enhanced through his contact with the presumed virility of black men and sensuousness of black women. I show how the folkloric images of blackness in Entre Colores are gendered, racialized, and sexualized in ways that fetishize the conventillo’s blackness. In psychoanalytic theory, the fetish implies a disavowal. What is disavowed through the conventillo fetish is the fiction of race/class boundaries. The subject attempts to maintain the boundary between blackness and whiteness by objectifying certain aspects of conventillo life: the women washing laundry and the playing children become part of a landscape alongside the cats, birds, and dogs. The relationship between Afro-Uruguayan people, music, and dance is essentialized so that blackness becomes synonymous with a primal, anachronistic past. I argue that this fetish reveals the construction and disavowal of race difference. Fixing difference as emanating from the conventillo, allows the dominant subject to forget his implication in constituting the marginality of the space.

The next chapter pursued the national connection to the conventillo’s blackness through an analysis of a national icon who, I argued, embodied the conventillo. The prominence of the vedette Rosa Luna shows the centrality of an archetypal black femininity within the national imaginary. I analyzed Rosa Luna’s performance and the audience response to argue that such performances simultaneously usher in, and disturb, the raced/gendered symbolic order. This analysis drew attention to how the symbolic order may be evoked - not only through private, “familial,” specular moments – but also through public performances of black femininity. While Rosa Luna’s performance did not mean the same thing to all people, her national adoration revealed that the fetishes, desires, and engulfment anxiety discussed in chapter four, are useful for thinking about the nation’s relationship to blackness. At least some of the effusive responses to Rosa Luna revealed a complex desire for, and disavowal of, black femininity. Psychoanalytic theory holds that the child disavows desire for the mother in order to maintain a sense of “himself” as a separate entity. I argued that the vacillation between desire and disavowal vis-à-vis Rosa Luna indicates the need to reinstate racial boundaries. I ended by
considering the “potent” and “fragile” positioning of the vedette and the implications for thinking about resistance.

**Limitations of the Study and Future Directions**

This study has by no means exhausted the exploration of race and the *conventillo*. Here I have focused primarily on the relational constitution of white masculinity and black femininity. While I have gestured towards the construction of white femininity and black masculinity, more in-depth studies are needed to connect these to space and blackness. I did not take a close look, for instance, at the role of *candombe* in constituting Afro-Uruguayan masculinity, a pertinent theme given that drumming has been traditionally defined as Afro-Uruguayan and male. My exploration of the domestication and sexualization of black women vis-à-vis the *conventillo* also leaves many unanswered questions regarding the geographies of white femininity. Furthermore, while my study considers the geography of the *conventillo*, these places no longer exist. Therefore it is urgent to consider how dispersion has informed the configuration of racialized power relations and identities. I discuss a potential line of research with respect to the city’s participatory model of government in the afterword.

A second line of inquiry could consider the growing role of *candombe* – and thus blackness – in defining the nation. Following the decline of the *conventillos*, *candombe* has become even more integral to the national identity. Since the 1980s, drum-playing *comparsas* began to emerge all over Montevideo and in the country’s interior. Even posh beach-side neighbourhoods like Malvín have drummers who gather each week to parade through the streets. Some have likened this development to a passing fad that dilutes Afro-Uruguayan culture (Olivera Chirimini, 2006, personal communication). Others see it as an ethnic expression that was transformed into an instrument of protest during Uruguay’s dictatorship (Trigo, 1993). Given the complex place occupied by blackness within the national imaginary, I believe it is crucial to study this development and think about its implications. Such an investigation could pose questions such as: What type of knowledge is being transmitted by the performance, for the performers and for the
audience? How does performing *candombe* inform a subject’s sense of self and group identity? How does the audience perceive the performance and the performers? Does it matter who is performing, who is watching, and where?

In chapter one, I repeated the oft-noted fact that “the history of black subjects in the diaspora is a geographic story that is, at least in part, a story of material and conceptual placements and displacements” (McKittrick, 2006, p. xiv). I also indicated that Afro-Uruguayan culture was pathologized to justify the evictions in Barrio Sur and Palermo (Benton, 1986). Given the troubling relations resulting from the essentialized linkage between Afro-Uruguayans, identity, and culture, I end this thesis by expanding upon the “poetics and politics” of the *conventillo*.

**Two Tales of Eviction**

*Yo me acuerdo del último día, antes de que vinieran los camiones municipales, que una chica de un canal vino a ver si estábamos de fiesta porque tocábamos los tambores,” cuenta Judith Silva de 64 años, que hacía siete años que estaba viviendo en Ansina cuando se enteró que tenía que irse. ‘Nos están sacando como animales y quieren que estemos alegres, le contesté. Tocábamos los tambores porque estábamos doloridos. Al otro día, a las 6 de la mañana, empezaron a venir los camiones. En ese momento sentí como si me estuvieran apaleando; no hay explicación.*

(“I remember the last day, before the municipal trucks came, there was a young woman from channel five who came to see if we were having a party because we were drumming,” says Judith Silva, 64 years old, who had been living in Ansina for seven years when she was evicted. “They are throwing us out like animals and they want us to be happy,’ I answered her. We played the drums because we were hurting. The next day, at six a.m., the trucks began to arrive. At that moment I felt as if I was being beaten; there is no other way to describe it.”) (Judith in Lima, 2006, p. 1)

As Edgardo Ortuño indicates, in the epigraph to this chapter, December 3, 1978 marked the last sounding of the drums of Medio Mundo (see figure 16). It was the night before the residents were forcibly evicted. In this section, I consider two narratives that recount these last moments from very different perspectives. The first is a newspaper
report, which appeared in *El Día*. It is a description of residents bidding farewell to their neighbourhood through what appears to be a celebration. This account emphasizes the exceptionality of black culture in its ability to demonstrate joy in times of hardship.

The second narrative is a fictionalized account of that moment. Jorge Emilio Cardoso’s play, *El Desalojo de la calle de los Negros*, (The Eviction of the street of the blacks) complicates the idea of black celebration during hardship.

The newspaper article from *El Día* dated Dec. 4, 1978 discusses the events of the day before in Medio Mundo. The writer reports that:

*Una fiesta como sólo puede producirse en este inigualado “Medio Mundo”, seguramente un fenómeno que no registra nada siquiera parecido en ninguna parte. Porque cuesta concebir un lugar en que tantas familias, tantos niños, puedan compartir la humildad de cada día en medio de la contagiante alegría que les acompaña. Acaso la explicación está en la raíz de una raza como la negra, donde las penas parecen arrancar en el fondo de la historia, pero siempre acompañadas en el doble de un tamboril, con el ritmo metido en el cuerpo, casi como una manifestación espiritual de su esencia.*

(A party like this can only happen in the unequaled Medio Mundo, surely it is a phenomenon that could not happen anywhere else. Because if is difficult to conceive that so many families, so many children, could share in the humility of every day in the midst of this contagious happiness. Perhaps the explanation lies in the roots of a race such as the black one, where hardships happen to be pulled from the depths of history, but are always accompanied by the beat of the drum, with the rhythm carried within the body, almost like a manifestation of its spiritual essence.)

*(El Día, Dec. 4, 1978)*

The article goes on the talk about the exceptionality of the black race. Here we can see how the body, geography and race are inextricably bound. For this writer, the *conventillo* residents embody blackness and those who embody blackness are exceptional in their ability to face tragedy with pleasure, qualities that receive a double edged admiration.

The reporter wonders if, “Perhaps they have no consciousness of what is happening to them.” The last quote shows us the reporter’s conception of a special people, a people

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82 *El Día* was a Montevideo daily (1886-late 1990s), which was founded by one of the nation’s most influential presidents, José Batlle y Ordóñez (1856-1929).

83 Jorge Emilio Cardoso is an Afro-Uruguayan playwright and poet, who grew up in a *conventillo* in Ciudad Vieja (see above). This writer has been recognized as a major Afro-Uruguayan voice and for his ability to write poetry and historical fiction (M. A. Lewis, 2003).
without the capacity to know what is happening to them. He constitutes blackness as pure embodiment, without a consciousness or mind, mirroring Páez’s sentiments about the “black race’s” propulsion to dance. It also calls to mind Mohanram’s (1999) observation that the black body is constituted as sheer embodiment. These people are different.

Interestingly, the reporter does not report on the residents’ viewpoints on that day. Had he done so, he might have gleaned a different side of the story, such as Judith above reveals. For Judith the drums signified pain, not happiness.

In the second narrative of the evictions, Cardoso (1998) imagines the conversations that residents may have had in the days prior to the evictions in his play El desalojo de la calle de los negros. Through these conversations Cardoso historicizes Afro-Uruguayan presence in the neighbourhood. The neighbours discuss their ancestors, who entered the nation as slaves and continue to be predominantly employed as domestic workers, porters, and in other menial positions. Some residents dwell on how they can find jobs when they do not even know where they will be living. Two young women joke about leaving their Pocitos address and phone number with potential employers. Cardoso raises the tensions and struggles over the meaning of blackness for those who embody it. In fact, preoccupations over respectability, as entangled with race, sexuality, and gender is never far from the minds and bodies of the conventillo residents. For instance, one of the older women refuses to dance when the drums start playing, due to concerns over propriety. On seeing a group of young men getting ready to drum Doña Petrona remarks:

Este desalojo es un crimen...?no les parece que nuestra amargura merece algún respeto ?...Pero si quieren tocar esos tambores, es cosa de Uds. haganlo, allá afuera, lejos...!donde pronto nos van a echar a todos!

84 It has been pointed out to me that these sources – El Día and Páez Vilaró – represent a conservative worldview. This may be true. Yet, this view of Afro-Uruguayans as lacking political consciousness is visible elsewhere. For instance, Abril Trigo (1993), holds that candombe did not become a political force until it was taken up by the left in the 1980s and 1990s. Néstor Silva (personal communication) insightfully pointed to me that a popular “leftie” singer, El Zabalero, also undermines candombe when he sings, “El tamboril se olvida y la miseria no.” (The drum forgets, but not misery.) The lack of political or community consciousness among the Afro-Uruguayan conventillo residents is also repeated by Francisco Merino, who led the Teatro Negro Uruguayo in this neighbourhood and Ernesto Kroch, a housing activist who also lived in the neighbourhood (Kroch, 2004; Merino, 1982). Thank you to Eduardo Canel for getting me to reflect on this issue.

85 Pocitos is a chic, beach-side neighbourhood in Montevideo.
(This eviction is a crime… doesn’t it seem to you that our bitterness deserves some respect? But if you want to play those drums, it’s up to you. Do it, way over there, far…where soon they are going to throw all of us!)

(Cardoso, 1998, p. 22)

This contradicts the reporter’s notion of black people’s propulsion to dance, despite all the problems. Cardoso, however, also shows us that there are different positions on the role of music. For some residents, the drums are a political statement. Another character, Kaulicoro explains to Doña Petrona that for him the drums are a form of spiritual resistance. Kaulicoro chants:

\[
\begin{align*}
Al \ repique \ de \ sus \ sones \\
\text{volverán nuestros ancestros:} \\
\text{aquellos abuelos nuestros } \\
\text{que se unieron en Naciones.}
\end{align*}
\]

(To the beat of their sounds our ancestors will return those grandparents of ours who gathered in Nations.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Somos hijos de Canaán} \\
\text{y los nietos de Noé} \\
\text{que nos maldijo porque} \\
\text{se encegueció por la ira.}
\end{align*}
\]

We are children of Canaan and the grandchildren of Noah who condemned us because he was blinded by rage.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{....} \\
\text{Venga, hermanos a oír} \\
\text{Este son de la añoranza} \\
\text{Que nos dará una esperanza} \\
\text{Para poder resistir.}
\end{align*}
\]

Come, brothers and sisters to hear this song of longing that will give us hope in order to be able to resist.)

(Cardoso, 1998, p. 23)

Kaulicoro’s verse links the residents to other historical struggles and inserts them into a universal history. As Katherine McKittrick notes, a fundamental strategy of domination – evident in the evictions – is the denial of a place for blackness. Evoking an ancestry that links him and the conventillo residents to Africa, Canaan, and the biblical exodus, Kaulicoro constitutes blackness as deeply historic, geographic, and human. Kaulicoro’s invocation of Africa could potentially be read as essentializing blackness. In fact, his girlfriend, Ebolova, makes this point. Ebolova refuses to identify with Africa, “¿Por que te empeñas tanto en buscarme otras patrias? ¡Yo ya tengo una y bien orgullosa que estoy!” (Why do you insist on finding me another homeland? I already have one and I am proud of it!) (Cardoso, 1998, p. 12). The play de-essentializes blackness by given voice to the plurality of Afro-Uruguayan politics.
A third compelling character is an older woman named Diamantina, who refuses to leave. Her granddaughter can’t stop the ill woman from walking up and down the streets, literally claiming the space with her feet. Diamantina says, “Why can’t I die here…! I have so little time left” (Cardoso, p. 28). Diamantina’s character is based on actual accounts of several older people, who greatly resisted leaving. Tragically, some of these residents declined in health and died shortly after the evictions (Lima, 2006; Silva, personal communication).

I am positing that El Desalojo demonstrates that “black geographies, imaginative and material, are critical of spatial inequalities, evidence of geopolitical struggles, and demonstrative of real and possible geographic alternatives” (McKittrick, 2006). Cardoso’s play opens up ways of thinking about the relation between Afro-Uruguayans, geography, and cultural practices. El Desalojo de la calle de los negros foregrounds the politics of Afro-Uruguayan culture, as it makes blackness both geographic and historical. Cardoso’s play suggests that the resistance to an essentialized blackness involves what McKittrick calls “spatial desires” and what Michel de Certeau (1984, pp. 37-38) refers to as “tactics of the weak.” Tactics of the weak describes the informal and often unrecognized ways that people resist conditions of oppression. Whether expressed as the insistence on claiming a Pan-African or Uruguayan identity, or dying in the neighbourhood, the characters in El Desalojo, express multiple and sometimes conflicting spatial desires that are undeniably political.

Cardoso’s play brings up once again, the constrictions of being a folklorized subject. In El Desalojo, several characters show an awareness that candombe positions them precariously. Throughout the thesis, I make visible some ways that Afro-Uruguayans contest their restrictive positioning. I have also noted the important role that candombe and the conventillo have played with respect to Afro-Uruguayan identity and resistance. This indicates a conundrum that faces Afro-Uruguayans and other racially marginalized communities. While their cultural practices and ghettoized neighbourhoods may be exoticized, for many people they are also sources of identity, education, religion, and/or politics of resistance. Michael Hanchard (2006) notes that we need to recognize the politics of black cultural practices, without assuming that every instance of black culture is political. In the Uruguayan case, the most heavily fetishized sites and practices
such as Barrio Sur, Palermo, and *candombe* – overlap with the “grounds” of resistance. From an anti-racist political standpoint, this raises critical questions regarding how to contest dominance while avoiding the pitfalls of either the denial, or re-fetishization, of “Afro-Uruguayanness.”

Farley (1997, p. 530) suggests that an awareness of the way black bodies have been “totally imprinted by history” can lead to several responses. On the one hand, it can lead to a “cast[ing] aside” of the body altogether, to an absolute submission and fearlessness that can only end in autodestruction and thus “experience being the captains of our fate” (Farley, 1997, p. 530). This is how Farley understands the black-on-black violence that is present in many US communities. But there is another opening. Awareness can also lead to political action and resistance.

We the fetish objects who have become aware of ourselves as fetish objects, are, therefore, no longer objects, but subjects…. A critical ontology of the body begins with the notion of the body as a part of an order which can always be subverted. Having transgressed the limit of pleasure-in-subalternation, we are on the cusp of a new pleasure formation. We…the fetish objects, have begun a conversation with each other.

(Farley, 1997, p. 530)

That conversation between “fetish objects” is perhaps a launching pad for subverting the dominant narrative. In Uruguay, this conversation has a long history. The journalistic tradition of black Uruguayans dates back to the 19th century (Jackson, 1979). According to Richard Jackson, it “reached its pinnacle between 1933 and 1948 – dates that represent the major period of the life of *Nuestra Raza*, the best known and most stable of the black publications in the country” (Jackson, 1979, p. 93). In *Nuestra Raza*, black writers tackled the themes of their official “invisibility” and contested white supremacy through journalism and poetry (Jackson, 1979, p.96). These writers debated whether Afro-Uruguayans should participate in *candombe* and other “folkloric” traditions at all. Some insisted that the way forward was to abandon cultural practices that were holding them back. This was the position held, for example, by Manuel Villa, the founder of the magazine Bahía Hulán Jack (1958).

Yet others believe that culture and *candombe* are an integral part of Afro-Uruguayan culture and resistance. Organizaciones Mundo Afro is a contemporary political organization dedicated to battling racism and advocating for the rights of Afro-
Uruguayans. It is a network of national organizations that work on various fronts including culture, education, health, youth, and women’s rights. In recent years Mundo Afro has opened up spaces for Afro-Uruguayan issues on local and national agendas. Angélica, an activist, describes how Mundo Afro has been instrumental in talking back:

[We] began to make interventions in the press, to continually provide opinions, to make demands, to raise the problems but also the solutions, and to defolklorize the black collectivity. [We say] Yes, to acknowledging the culture, yes to foregrounding the historical community, but taking up culture as a creation of the human being.

(Angélica, in Porzecanski & Santos, 2006, p. 108)

Angélica is pointing to political strategies that seek to denaturalize the relation between black Uruguayans and music. What she calls a “defolklorization” is perhaps also a “defetishization.”

These considerations are particularly relevant at this historical moment, when local and national governments are working with Afro-Uruguayan groups to implement more inclusive policies. For instance, the instigation of the Día del candombe, mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, was driven by the efforts of the first Afro-Uruguayan member of parliament, Edgar Ortuño. The findings here suggest that any invocation of blackness needs to be understood from the perspective of how it is being mobilized, and how it is being received. Does it involve a fetishization of black bodies, images, or practices; or, does it involve a serious engagement with the ideas, demands, and politics of a group that identifies itself on its terms? I hope that by drawing attention to the way that blackness symbolically “nourishes” the nation, through processes that work through place, subjectivity, and power, I have contributed to defetishizing blackness.
To end, I want to think about the links between my research and recent developments in Uruguayan politics. During a lecture in Toronto this February, Eduardo Canel presented the findings of his long-term study of Montevideo’s experience with participatory democracy. Since 1990, Montevideans have elected successive Frente Amplio-Encuentro Progresista (FA-EP) municipal governments. The FA-EP (a coalition of centre to left-wing parties) implemented a model of participatory democracy, which emphasizes decentralization and the participation of communities in their own governance. Canel’s (2009) comparative study of several working-class neighbourhoods identifies the factors that led to a community’s relative “success” with the participatory model. He found that a strong neighbourhood identity, a community’s experience with collective activism, the leadership capacity within a community, and their access to social capital were all significant indicators of satisfaction with the participatory model.

One of the findings that intrigued me is that one neighbourhood, which has not fared as well as others is El Cerro. El Cerro has a strong tradition of syndicalism and local political leadership, because of its history as a meat-packing district. According to Canel, there several factors contributed this neighbourhood’s difficulties with participatory democracy. First of all, the old radical leaders were not used to working with cooperatively with the state. Their adversarial activism is not so suited to the participatory model. Secondly, this community suffered economically and socially due to the relocation of meatpacking plants to other parts of the country. There was a third, critical factor identified by Canel. El Cerro received an influx of new residents over the years, many of them people who had been evicted from the city centre. For the “old guard,” these “newcomers” are outsiders, people who are not traditional Cerrenses. They are perceived as needy people, who suck resources from the community. For instance, many are squatter who may demand water service something that is not a priority for long-term Cerro residents. Moreover, they are perceived as morally inferior,

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86 Canel measured success qualitatively according to the local satisfaction with the experience.
87 Canel points out that some of the newcomers are not so new since several waves of evictions have led to several “migrations” to the Cerro since the 1970s.
criminal, and apolitical. According to many longtime Cerro residents, the newcomers lack a political formation. In short, the newcomers are resented and viewed as “social scum” (Canel, 2009). Canel noticed that this caused a schism in the community meetings, affecting the ability of the local council to gain consensus and to function satisfactorily.

Reading Canel’s study alongside this thesis raises critical questions. The idea that the newcomers lacked a political consciousness needs to be studied in order to see how it may be racialized as well as class-based. This lack has been connected with Afro-Uruguayans before. It was implicit in the *El Día* article. Other examples include literary critic Abril Trigo (1993), who holds that *candombe* did not become a political force until it was taken up by the left in the 1980s and 1990s. Néstor Silva (2006, personal communication) insightfully pointed out that a popular” singer, El Sabalero, undermines *candombe* when he sings, “*El tamboril se olvida y la miseria no.*” (The drum forgets, but not misery.) The perception of a lack of political or community consciousness among Afro-Uruguayans residents is also seen in Francisco Merino (1982), who led the Teatro Negro Uruguyano. His book, *El negro en la sociedad montevideana*, determined that there is no Afro-Uruguayan collectivity based on the lack of response to his initiatives. Ernesto Kroch, a housing activist who also lived in Barrio Sur and Palermo, describes a similar trend (Kroch, 2004). In short, people who are associated with music and dance, and inherently the body, are not traditionally considered to be “rational” political subjects. Thus it is urgent to consider: What happens to subjects perceived as “carnivalized” within the context of participatory democracy? What happens to those who are not considered conscious political subjects?

Lastly, there is an overtly geographic element to this problem. In a model that requires not only that you identify with the neighbourhood, but that the neighbourhood identifies with you, what happens with those social groups that have no territorial base? To what extent do participatory democracy models address the displacement of groups due to historical inequities such as racism? In other words: What is the place of the displaced within neighbourhood-based governance? In 2006, the same year that *El Día del Candombe* was instituted, the government also made a commitment to build new

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88 Thank you to Eduardo Canel for getting me to reflect on this issue.
cooperatives in Barrio Sur and Palermo, a percentage of which would be reserved for the originally displaced families (Lima, 2006). It had been thirty years since many of them had left and the neighbourhood has undergone gentrification. It remains to be seen whether these families will be welcomed as neighbours, or seen as interlopers once again. I believe that all of the above questions point the way to areas of research that must be pursued, given the prominence of participatory democracy, not only in Uruguay, but throughout Latin America and the world.
### Appendix A

#### Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>candombe</td>
<td>A style of music, largely identified with Afro-Uruguayans. The music is based on distinctive drumming rhythms that originated with African and Afro-descendant slaves, who blended African rhythms with the European musical traditions encountered in the River Plate region (Tomás Olivera Chirimini, 2001; Tomás Olivera Chirimini &amp; Varese, 2000). The music is now taken up as an identifier of the nation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comparsa</td>
<td>A troupe of candombe drummers and dancers, usually identified with a particular neighbourhood or <em>conventillo</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>llamadas</td>
<td>The name given to a unique Afro-Uruguayan drumming procession that can be translated as the “calling of the drums.” Drummers from one <em>conventillo</em> drum through the streets engaging in “battle” with rival drummers. Although not originally a part of Montevideo’s carnival, this tradition was incorporated within the festival in the 1950s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lubolo</td>
<td>A name made up by white blackface Carnival performers in the late 1800s. It referred to the natives of a fictitious African nation. Over time, the term began to be applied to black performers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vedette</td>
<td>A lead female carnival performer who dances in an extravagant costume, which typically consists of a revealing bikini, a feather head-dress, and very high heels.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B
Data Sources

Biographical and autobiographical sources

*El barquero del Río Jordán : Canto a la Biblia*

Martha Gularte (1998, 90 pp.)

This is the only published book of poetry by Afro-Uruguayan dancer and writer, Martha Gularte (1919 – 2002, bio in chapter three). Of very humble origins, Gularte once remarked, “Yo nací esclava, fui sirventita en casas de grandes familias, y cuando me vine para Montevideo no me liberé.” (I was born a slave. I was a little maid in the homes of great families, and when I came to Montevideo, I was not liberated.) (Belgranoweb, 2002). In addition to Gularte’s poetry, the book contains an extensive introduction (65 pp.) by Néstor G. Ganduglia and Cecilia Blezio (1998), which includes interviews with Gularte. I draw upon the material in these interviews in chapters three, four, and five.

*Entre colores y tambores: Viaje desde la punta de la cerbatana, hasta la lonja del tamboril*

Carlos Páez Vilaró (2000, 239 pp.)

This book is Vilaró’s autobiographical reflection on his relationship to Afro-Uruguayan culture, particularly to conventillo Medio Mundo in Barrio Sur (bio in chapter four). As explained earlier, Vilaró is a visual artist whose career began when he “discovered” Medio Mundo and he began to paint the *conventillo*. The book is written as both a historical text – the first half sketches out a rough Afro-Uruguayan history from slavery to present, the second half recounts the author’s relationship to Afro-Uruguayans and Medio Mundo. I examine this text in chapter five.
Historias de Exclusión: Afrodescendientes en el Uruguay
Teresa Porzecanski and Beatriz Santos (2006, 139 pp.)

Historias de Exclusión: Afrodescendientes en el Uruguay (139 pp.) edited by Teresa Porzecanski and Beatriz Santos (2006) features the autobiographical reflections of twelve Afro-Uruguayans. This is a second edition and features one more contributor than the first volume, published in 1994. Most of the contributors are identified only by their first-name, but some are identifiable figures from the Afro-Uruguayan community, such as the artist Ruben Galloza (1926-2002), an artist who painted Afro-Uruguayan themes; Martha Gularte, who came to fame as a carnival dancer; Lagríma Ríos, who was renowned as a tango singer; and Beatriz Santos, an actress, writer, activist, who is also one of the editors of the book. In the introduction, the editors explain how they have selected the stories:

We have selected the “life histories” presented here on the basis of meaningful parameters that represent the trajectory of an ethnic minority, originally composed of different African cultures, and subjected to a forceful acculturation to a Western way of life. Taken together, they provide a panoramic gaze at some aspects of the Afro-Uruguayan community, which for the past two centuries has been deeply inserted into the history of this country.

(Porzecanski & Santos, 2006, p.8)

Anthropologist Alejandro Frigerio (2000) considers this anthology to be the only work of its kind, tracking Afro-Uruguayan experiences in their own voices:

Al introducir las propias voces de los afrouruguayos narrando su historia personal y reflexionando acerca de su cultura, el libro brinda una imagen más realista de lo que significa ser negro en Uruguay. Los numerosos testimonios sobre las experiencias de racismo cotidiano y acerca del rol de las asociaciones comunitarias negras en la lucha por la igualdad, permiten vislumbrar aspectos importantes de la dinámica interna de la comunidad negra, así como de las relaciones en la sociedad uruguaya.

(By introducing Afro-Uruguayans in their own voices, narrating their personal histories, and reflecting upon their culture, this book brings us a more realistic picture of what it means to be black in Uruguay. The numerous testimonies of

89 The first edition was Porzecanski, T., & Santos, B. (Eds.). (1994). Historias de vida: Negros en el Uruguay. Montevideo, Uruguay: EPPAL.
everyday racism and the role of the black community associations in the struggle for equality, allow us to discern important aspects of the internal dynamics of the black community, as well as of relations within Uruguayan society.)

(Frigerio, 2000)

I examine some of the autobiographical reflections from Porzecanski and Santos (2006) in chapters three and four.

_Sin tanga y sin tongo_
Rosa Luna (1988, 111pp.)

_Sin tanga y sin tongo_ is the autobiography of Rosa Luna (1933-1994), one of Uruguay’s most famous carnival vedettes (see chapter five for bio). Here she recounts her early childhood, youth, career, and thoughts. The book was published in 1988, when the author was also writing a semi-weekly column for the daily newspaper, _La República_. The tone is conversational. The book is written as a compilation of short essays that are titled, for instance, “the stage,” “yesterday,” “today,” and “woman.” The book is illustrated with photos and illustrations of Rosa Luna and Medio Mundo. I refer to this book in chapter five.

_Una mujer llamada Rosa Luna_
Ettore Pierri (1994)

Written by Ettore Pierri (1994), this is an official biography of Rosa Luna, which was published posthumously. The author was, and is, a reporter with the Montevideo daily newspaper _La República_. He was also a friend of Rosa Luna. This book includes some of Rosa Luna’s own reflections on her life, as well as some of her newspaper columns, and many reflections on the performer from other people. They include members of the music community, the Afro-Uruguayan community, government representatives, as well as anonymous persons. I draw data from this book in my discussion of Rosa Luna’s performance in chapter five.
**Literary Sources**

*Antología de poetas negros uruguayos* (volumes I and II)

Edited by Alberto Britos (1990; Britos, 1997) these two anthologies are the only ones of their kind, uniting the work of many Afro-Uruguayan poets from the 20th-century. Alberto Britos (1910-2001) was one of the only literary historians to dedicate himself to the study of Afro-Uruguayan literature. In these two volumes, he unites the work of many of the known (relatively) Afro-Uruguayan poets. Quite a few were previously unpublished. These two anthologies include works by Francisco Guatimí, Martha Gularte, Juan Julio Arrascaeta, Gilberto Silva, Richard Piñeiro, and Nancy Pereira. I refer to some of these poems in chapter three, where I provide more information on the cited poets.

*El desalojo de la calle de los negros*
Jorge Emilio Cardoso (1995, 45 pp.)

This is a play written by Jorge Emilio Cardoso, an Afro-Uruguayan playwright who was born in ( ). *El desalojo de la calle de los negros* was written and performed in 1992, the play was published in 1995 and has now been published again in an anthology of Cardoso’s writing (Cardoso, 2008). Poignantly, the play was performed by many former residents of Barrio Sur and Palermo in the ruins of the conventillo Ansina. Literary critic Marvin Lewis (2003, p. 119) describes Cardoso as “a first-rate poet and dramatist whose recent autobiography further attests to his creative abilities.” Cardoso grew up in a conventillo that was located in a nearby neighbourhood, Ciudad Vieja and has long-time connections to Barrio Sur and Palermo. The writer was exiled in Chile during the dictatorship, but now lives in Montevideo. I consider this play primarily in chapter six and I make reference to some of Cardoso’s other works throughout the thesis.

*Carnaval de Lubolos*
Andrés Castillo and Raúl Mené (1996, 34 pp.)
Carnaval de Lubolos is a 34 page play written by Andrés Castillo and Raúl Mené and staged in 1966. The play was published in Juanamaría Cordones-Cook’s (1996) ¿Teatro negro uruguayo? Texto y contexto del teatro afro-uruguayo de Andrés Castillo, a book that critically examines the work of Andres Castillo with the Teatro Negro Uruguayo (Black Uruguayan Theatre). This theatre company was formed by two white Uruguayan lawyers, Francisco Merino (1911-1982) and Castillo(1920-2004), who had a strong background in independent theatre. Raúl Mene (b. 1934) was a middle-class Afro-Uruguayan, who attended the seminary and law school before becoming a writer. According to Cordones-Cook, this theatre company was founded in 1963 as a type of social service, in order to serve members of the Afro-Uruguayan community in Barrio Sur and Palermo. They saw education as their mission:

Merino aspiraba alfabetizar y educar al negro a partir de las artes dramáticas con clases de idiomas, ingles en particular, de culturas africanas, de emisión de voz, canto coral y movimiento escénico y danza.

(Merino hoped to bring literacy and education to the black [people] from the point of view of dramatic arts, language class, particularly English. They also provided instruction in African cultures, voice training, choral singing, movement, and dance.)

(Cordones-Cook, 1996, p. 33)

The company produced plays, using local people, not trained actors. The plays attempted to “rescue” Afro-Uruguayan traditions (Cordones-Cook, 1996, p. 35). I focus on the play, Carnaval de Lubolos, which is set in a conventillo courtyard. The play follows the characters as they prepare for carnival in the midst of daily hardships, gossip, and quarrels. Set in a 1920s conventillo, which is reminiscent of Medio Mundo, the play is filtered through the 1960s, the time when it was written. Written in this context, I find that Carnaval de Lubolos presents a very typical representation of conventillo life, that corresponds with many popular depictions. All of the action takes place in the courtyard, the heart of the conventillo. There are children playing, men who are arguing, talking, fighting over work, and playing the drums. The women are engaged in laundering, gossiping, and arguing. The play thus reproduces some of the stereotypical ways that
conventillo dwellers are usually represented, but also provides insights into the hierarchies that organized the space.

**Media sources**

**El Día**

*El Día* was a Montevideo daily (1886-late 1990s), which was founded by one of the nation’s most influential presidents, José Batlle y Ordóñez (1856-1929). I researched this newspaper for accounts of the evictions and demolitions in the late 1970s.

**Día del Patrimonio 2007: Culturas Afrouruguayas**

Ministerio de Educación y Cultura

This 24 page magazine was published by the Ministry of Culture in October, 2007 to commemorate that year’s heritage celebration of Afro-Uruguayan culture. The magazine includes an overview of Afro-Uruguayan history and culture, as well as articles on the three primary figures that were celebrated, Martha Gularte, Lagríma Ríos, and Rosa Luna.

**Mundo Uruguayo**

Mundo Uruguayo was a weekly news magazine, founded in 1919 and published until the mid 1960s, that included fashion and social pages, as well as short stories. As the name of the magazine suggests, the magazine was intended as a reflection of Uruguayan middle-class society. I reviewed issues from the 1940s, 50s, and 60s in order to find mainstream representations of Afro-Uruguayans, the conventillo, and more generally, blackness and whiteness.

**La República**

*La República* is a Montevideo daily newspaper founded in 1988. I looked at this newspaper from 1988 to the early 1990s to research Rosa Luna’s newspapers columns, written in this time period.
Throughout the thesis, I have also drawn on various Internet sources for materials, particularly articles on artists. These articles supplement the primary data and are documented in the reference section.
Appendix C
Information Letter for Interview Participants

[letterhead]
[translated into Spanish]

Dear [name of participant]:

I am a doctoral student in Sociology and Equity Studies in Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. For my doctoral thesis I am doing research on the subject of race and citizenship in Uruguay, as viewed through the perspective of the conventillo Medio Mundo. The title of my thesis is Montevideo’s Medio Mundo: Race and the organization of space and citizenship.

My study consists of analyzing the writings of several Medio Mundo artists, and representations of Medio Mundo in the media and in popular songs. To fill in the scant published history of Medio Mundo, I am conducting interviews with four to eight individuals who are knowledgeable about Medio Mundo, Afro-Uruguayan history, or culture. It is because of your expertise in one or more of these areas that I kindly seek an interview with you, which will take approximately one to two hours of your time. I am interested in asking you questions regarding the history of Medio Mundo.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and there will be no remuneration. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to read and sign a letter of “Consent to participate in research” in which you agree that statements made during the interview can be included in my final thesis and any publications that may stem from it. You will receive a copy of this form, which guarantees your anonymity and confidentiality. During the interview, participants can decline to answer any question. Participants may also end the interview or withdraw from the study at any point in time without any negative consequences. I will be available to answer questions before, during, and after the interview. My contact information is below.
The anonymity of all participants will be maintained, unless you decide that you would like to be identified through your professional, public, or personal connection to Medio Mundo. If you choose to remain anonymous, I will protect your identity by using a pseudonym (which you may suggest), and I by removing any identifying details. Either way, you will have the opportunity to decide how you would like to be identified in the thesis, when referring to a direct quote from you. I would like you to be aware that due to your professional/public role and your specialized knowledge, there is a small risk that someone may recognize your identity despite taking the above precautions.

As a participant you may experience the benefit of sharing your knowledge to contribute to a study that seeks a better understanding of a period of Afro-Uruguayan history, and of the relation between race and citizenship in Uruguay.

I will be conducting digitally recorded (audio only) interviews. To safeguard this information, the recordings and transcripts will be kept under lock at my home and only my thesis supervisor, Dr. Sherene Razack, and I will have access to them. Once my thesis is completed, all the recordings and transcripts will be destroyed. I will provide you with a copy of the transcript so that you may check it for accuracy. At this time you may also decide that there are portions of the interview that you would not like to be used. I will be transcribing and translating all of the interviews from Spanish into English, and I can provide you with the translations as well as the original transcripts.

If you wish, I can provide you with a summary of my research findings when the thesis is completed. I can also make arrangements for participants who are interested in reading the whole thesis.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions before or after the interview. If you would like to talk to me by phone, please email me at the below address and let me know of a good time to call, so that you do not incur any long distance charges.

Sincerely,
Vannina Sztainbok
Phone: 416-654-6484 (Toronto)
    712-6487 (Montevideo, June 20-July 19, 2006)
email: vsztainbok@oise.utoronto.ca
Appendix D
Consent to Participate in Research
[translated into Spanish] [letterhead]

I, __________________________________, agree to be interviewed for a research study that is being conducted by Vannina Sztainbok, a Phd student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto as part of her degree requirement.

- I understand that the researcher will take measures to assure my anonymity, and that the recording and transcript of the interview will remain strictly confidential. I also understand that there is a small risk that I may be identifiable in the final thesis due to the specialized nature of the information I will be providing, and to my public/professional standing.
- I understand that I can decline to answer a question at any time during the interview.
- I understand that the researcher will provide a transcript of the interview.
- I understand that the researcher is free to use any of the materials from the interview in her study, unless I specify otherwise.
- I understand that I can withdraw from participating in this study at any time.

Please check which one is applicable:

_______While I realize there is a possibility that my identity may be exposed, I would like to remain anonymous. I understand that my name will not be used and that the researcher will not use any information that will reveal my identity in the undertaking of this study.

_______ I agree to be publicly identified in this study in my professional capacity or as an expert informant.

_________________________________  _______________________
Participant signature               Date
Please indicate whether you would like to receive a printed copy of the interview transcript:

Yes_____ Spanish _______

No_____ English _______

Please indicate whether you would like to receive a written summary of the research results, upon completion of the thesis:

Yes____

No____

If you answer yes to either of the above questions, please print your mailing or email address here:

________________________________

________________________________

________________________________

Researcher: Phone: 416-654-6484 (Toronto)

712-6487 (Montevideo, June 20-July 19, 2006)

Email: vsztainbokl@oise.utoronto.ca

Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

Supervisor: Dr. Sherene Razack

Phone: 416-923-6641 (ext. 2529)

Email: srazack@oise.utoronto.ca

Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto
Appendix E  
Interview Questions  
Preguntas

Primero tengo que hacerle algunas preguntas demográficas:

1. Puede decirme su nombre y su edad?
2. Cómo le gustaría ser identificado/a?
3. Cuál es su oficio?

Medio Mundo

4. Usted tiene alguna connexión a Medio Mundo y/o Barrio Sur y los conventillos?
   4a) Cuál es?

Si vivieron allí (si no, a la pregunta 11)

5. cuando vivió allí?
6. Con quien vivía (su familia)?

7. Usted cursaba la escuela del barrio?

8. Tenía amigos y amigas del barrio?

9. También hacía vida social fuera del barrio?

10. Puede contarme algo de como era vivir en el conventillo (o en Medio Mundo)?

Medio Mundo general
11. Tiene alguna memoria puntual que resalta sobre Medio Mundo y los conventillos del Barrio Sur (fiestas, eventos especiales)?
12. Que conoce sobre la historia del Medio Mundo?
13. Que conoce sobre la historia del Barrio Sur?
14. Donde aprendió esa historia?
15. En la escuela?
16. De los mayores?
17. de los medios?
18. Cuando la gente piensa en Medio Mundo, que se le ocurre?
19. Piensa usted, que tiene distintas conotaciones para distintas personas?
20. Por ejemplo, la conotación será distinta para una persona negra que una persona blanca?
21. Porque?
22. El Medio Mundo se conocía como un conventillo negro?
23. Que significaba eso?
24. Por ejemplo eso era una conotación positiva o negativa?
25. Porque?

**El significado de Medio Mundo**

26. Medio Mundo tiene un significado especial para los afro-uruguayos?
27. Porque?
28. Existen otros sitios que también tienen un significado especial?
29. Piensa que Medio Mundo es un sitio especial para los uruguayos en general?
30. Porque?
31. A usted le parece que es considerado un lugar especial para el patrimonio de la ciudad o el país? Es reconocido como tal?

**Significado cultural**

32. Puede nombrar algunos de esos artistas que provienen de Medio Mundo y Barrio Sur?
33. Hay algo especial acerca de estos lugares de donde surge tanto talento cultural?
34. Cual fue la época de la cumbre artística de este barrio?
35. Le parece que la cultura de Medio Mundo hizo un aporte a la cultura nacional?
   a) a la identidad nacional?
   b) Cual es el aporte?
36. Los siguientes artistas muchas veces son nombrados en conexión con Medio Mundo. Usted piensa que ellos hicieron un aporte al conventillo y Barrio Sur? Es decir, fueron ellos que lo pusieron en el mapa

Rosa Luna
Ruben Galloza
Martha Gularte
Teatro Negro Urugay
Grupo Bantú (Tomas Olivera)
Carlos Paez Vilaro
Ruben Rada
Lagrima Rios

37. Cual es?

38. Usted piensa que ese aporte se reconoce?

**Derrumbe de Medio Mundo**

39. Que conoce usted del derrumbe de Medio Mundo?
40. Me puede contar lo que sabe?
41. como se entero
42. Que es lo que ha cambiado desde que no esta Medio Mundo?
43. Ha causado algún cambio para la colectividad negra en general (aun la gente que no vivía allí).
44. Ha provocado algún cambio en la ciudad?

**Conmemoración**

45. usted sabe si hay planes para conmemorar este sitio?
46. Cuales son los planes?
47. Quien va a llevar a cabo esos planes?
48. Cuál es su opinion acerca de esos planes?

**Otras**

49. Yo he estado hablando del Medio Mundo y Barrio Sur. Que otros tipos de lugares en el pais son significativos para los afro-uruguayos?
50 Porque?
51. Usted sabe donde podria encontrar mas informacion sobre la historia de Medio Mundo?


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