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**Parodying the Popular: A Comparative
Study of the Afro-Cuban Literary
Imaginary of Guillermo Cabrera Infante
and Carleton Beals**

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This article comparatively examines the literary discursive formulas pertaining to Afro-Cuban culture as seen in the texts *Tres Tristes Tigres* (1967) by Guillermo Cabrera Infante and *The Crime of Cuba* (1933) by Carleton Beals. Amidst the continued effort of defining a national culture, a project evident during the first half of the twentieth century in Cuba, given the creation of the Republic of Cuba in 1902, the work of Cabrera Infante and Beals, albeit representative of distinct historical timeframes, displays Cuban racial identity in a format that is similar, not only in its style, but in the context of its proposed intent, given the parodist manner both share.¹ Throughout the literature and the arts of those eras, particularly throughout texts that feature the city of Havana and its corresponding popular cultures during the 1930s through the 1950s, it was common practice to illustrate national culture through literary representations that featured modes of “performing” race and ethnicity.² These modes, in a certain sense, essentialized and

¹ Among the key studies that analyze Cabrera Infante’s use of parodying, the study by William Rowlandson (2003) corroborates the following, “Parody, by the majority of standard definitions, is marginalized exclusively within the realm of imitation for the operatives of ridicule” (620) and “Parody, therefore, is a manner of imitation, in that the style, subject matter, language, or some other aspect of an artist or artistic style is reproduced in the work of another artist” (620). Rowlandson’s analysis of Cabrera Infante’s parodying of Hemingway in *Tres Tristes Tigres*, serves two functions, first “for the purpose of humor, of laughter” and a “second operative of the parody of Hemingway can emerge as a cathartic shedding of the burden of influence that Hemingway has exercised upon Cabrera Infante, upon the characters of his work, and according to these characters, upon Cuban writers in general” (621). Although both functions suggested by Rowlandson are key to the understanding of the proposals offered in this article, the second operative supports the idea that Cuban writers were both influenced by Hemingway and also prone to perpetuating and parodying similar styles, especially, as will be further discussed in this piece, when defining, representing, and essentializing Cuban national identity. Robin Moore in *Nationalizing Blackness: Afro-Cubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920-1940* details this trajectory.

² Recent research pertaining to that period on “performing” Afro-Cuban identity includes: Abreu (2012); Otero (2012); Costello (2007); González-Mandri (2006); Rodríguez Managual (2004); Aching (2002); Moore (1997); Kutzinski (1993). For approaches to the field of performance studies consult the

exoticized the notion of race in order to define, describe, and denote Cuban national identity, specifically the Afro-Cuban.³ My proposal examines the literary imaginary created by these two authors, which when compared and contrasted, share commonalities that feature both the use of the city's cartography –Havana—and a parodist format based upon the practice of essentializing race and ethnicity, an aesthetic that was popularized during that time.

Cuban cultural production during the later part of the nineteenth century and early to mid-twentieth century, primarily concerned itself with the issues associated with Independence and subsequently the development of the new Republic. The task of conceptualizing, describing, and illustrating a Cuban national identity, was fabricated based on a composite of caste, race, and religion, aspects that perpetuated the idea of defining “national” character.⁴ Representations of Afro-Cubans in texts of both late-nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century (colonial and post-colonial periods in Cuba) partook in a continued representational discourse that situated black subjects in a positional format inline with the *antiesclavista* literary movement, as William Luis has argued.⁵ The heavily nuanced representations of black Cuban culture seem to stem from a continued suppressed positionality of the Cuban black citizen even after the abolishment of slavery.⁶ The technique of exemplifying Afro-Cuban culture has been existent since the foundational fictions of the nineteenth century, as Luis argues, and can also be traced to the long-range history of the African presence earlier in the island's history, as Alejandro de la Fuente has indicated, as far back as the sixteenth century.⁷

During the 1930s, concurrent to the time of Beals, cultural production primarily concerned itself with racial hybridity and writers included romanticized and exoticized portrayals aligned with the vanguard movement of Afro-Cubanismo.⁸ On the other hand,

introduction of *Performativity and Performance*, edited by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Andrew Parker (Routledge, 1995).

³ Antoni Kapcia's book, *Havana: The Making of Cuban Culture*, details the historical trajectory of Africans in Cuba, detailing the rise of Afro-Cuban traditions, which subsequently became part of Cuban national culture (42-43).

⁴ The book *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture* by Louis A. Pérez lavishly details this history.

⁵ In his *Literary Bondage: Slavery in Cuban Narrative* William Luis explains the *antiesclavista* movement and an antislavery narrative aesthetic.

⁶ For a historical discussion of the racial and political situations of the time reference *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution* by Ada Ferrer and *Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth Century Cuba* by Alejandro de la Fuente.

⁷ Alejandro de la Fuente, in his book *Havana and the Atlantic in the Sixteenth Century*, features a chapter “Slavery and the Making of a Social Order” where he traces the beginning of race and social status in Cuba.

⁸ See Robin D. Moore's *Nationalizing Blackness: Afro-Cubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920-1940*.

during the time of the publication of Cabrera Infante's book (1960s)—although the book's narrative takes place during the 1950s, a contingent of radical intellectuals sought to fortify white and black culture as well as erudite and popular culture through their production, yet similarly put into practice some of the same literary mechanisms.⁹ My analysis in this piece examines the style and shape of these textual representations, pertaining to each of the author's respective historical timeframes, while highlighting their parodist nature and shedding light onto their importance within the Cuban cultural archive. Although the primary focus of this article is reviewing the textual representations offered by the literary works of Cabrera Infante and Beals, it is important to note that these practices can also be observed in other artistic realms including music, theatre, and material cultures, although they will not be elaborated in this piece.

I approach the literary performance mechanisms used by Beals and Cabrera Infante through an analysis of their creative staging of Afro-Cuban culture, venturing into the intricacies of these mechanisms in order to observe how they formulate their character's development, the character's interactions with other characters, and the spaces they inhabit. The staging process is significant of the literary choreography that the authors utilize in order to represent ideas, ideology, geographical landscapes, literary movements, and as a key technique in order to portray a parody of the essentialist stylistic format that was commonly used. For this reason, I consider both the text by Carleton Beals and the one by Cabrera Infante as significant pieces of *cubanía* or active participators of the formation and evolutionary process of Cuban national identity.¹⁰ In my opinion the staging done by Beals and Cabrera Infante is based on a purposeful and radical move in order to call attention to the positionality of Afro-Cubans in both textual representations and real social-political circumstances. Similarly, although in a different context, scholar Solimar Otero has proposed that Afro-Cuban religiosity (or the performance of religious work) – in contemporary times – is to be held as a representation of resistance.¹¹ In the case of the work of Beals and Cabrera Infante, on the other hand, it may seem like a far fetch to consider their work as “acts” of resistance, yet, arguments can be made as to the possible transgressive purposes involved in their use of that particular aesthetic style that they employed, one that clearly plays with the literary traditions that perpetuated essentialist discourses.¹²

⁹ This group of intellectuals formed part of cultural supplement *Lunes* which appeared in the Cuban weekly periodical *Revolución* between 1959 and 1961.

¹⁰ For an expanded definition of *cubanía* consult *The Cuban Condition: Translation and Identity in Modern Cuban Literature*. Editors: Gustavo Pérez-Firmat and Enrique Pupo-Walker.

¹¹ Solimar Otero's article “The Ruins of Havana: Representations of Memory, Religion, and Gender” proposes an exciting approach to the performing (practice) of Afro-Cuban religious cultures, in contemporary Cuba and throughout the diaspora, as a cultural project that should be “held up as a representation of resistance and Cuban national identity in a variety of historical instances” (153).

¹² It might be worth noting that Beals was a white North American writer; while Cabrera Infante, although of mixed-race background, was considered a white writer.

Guillermo Cabrera Infante, mostly a fiction writer, also embarked in journalistic writing and film criticism throughout the twentieth century. He is the author of titles, such as; *Así en la paz como en la Guerra* (1960), *Un oficio del siglo XX* (1963), *Vista del amanecer en el trópico* (1974), *Exorcismo de esti(l)lo* (1976), *Arcadia todas las noches* (1978), *Holy smoke* (1984), *Mea Cuba* (1993) he was also the recipient in 1997 of Spain's prestigious *Premio Cervantes*.¹³ His novel *Tres Tristes Tigres* was published in 1967 (thirty-four years after *The Crime of Cuba*) and became a manifesto of both textual and political revolution.¹⁴ The book framed both the aesthetic innovation of the Latin American "boom" movement and offered insight into the cultural-political situation of Cuba. *Tres Tristes Tigres*, published in English as *Three Trapped Tigers*, is meant to be more than a representation of the Havana microcosm, or a take on linguistic phonetics based on Cuban speech of the time, or even an ode to 1950s Havana nightlife. It is a novel that permits the study of a multitude of topics, many which have focused on Cabrera Infante's use of a particular spatial-temporal narrative style, the development of a contrived cast of characters (many based on real nightlife personalities), and Cabrera Infante's knack for mirroring and parodying other writers.¹⁵ It presents the locus of Havana with ample detail of nightlife, adventure and landscape, while personifying Cuban lifestyle by displaying themes of entertainment associated with tourism. Cabrera Infante's left wing political activism against Batista's regime and his opposition to the culturally stagnant and capitalistically oriented Cuban society of the time was at the root of the text's original version. In subsequent versions, equally present, but perhaps more subversive, was Cabrera Infante's later adopted opposition to Castro's tight hold on creative expression, which was clearly connected to censorship of his brother's *PM* documentary.¹⁶ *Tres Tristes Tigres* was both a commentary of the tourist mecca that Cuba had become during the 1950s and also a statement about the romanticized and exoticized paradise stereotype that was created by both Cuban and foreign sources and appropriated as a symbol of a Cuban way of life and Cuban identity during that epoch. It also served as a nostalgic text that intended to memorialize that soon to be gone era, given the changing climate under the recently established government of Fidel Castro.¹⁷

¹³ See Raymond D. Souza's *Guillermo Cabrera Infante: Two Islands, Many Worlds*.

¹⁴ In this piece I refer to *Tres Tristes Tigres* as both a novel and a book. However, I would like to mention that some scholars (including Isabel Álvarez Borland in her article "Identidad cíclica de *Tres Tristes Tigres*") have preferred not to consider *TTT* a novel but to refer to it as a novella, or collection of recurring short stories, or a narrative text composed of vignettes.

¹⁵ Three key studies have explored the use of mirroring and parody in Cabrera Infante: Siemens (1979); Peavler (1979); and Rowlandson (2003).

¹⁶ For a historical review of the case of Sabá Cabrera Infante's *PM* consult Michael Chanan's book *Cuban Cinema*.

¹⁷ Raymond D. Souza's chapter "A Momentary Splendor" (31-45) relates Cabrera Infante's ideological trajectory during those first years of the revolution. Especially important are those events related to the limitations imposed by Castro's censors on creative expression during that time, which in turn served the primary motive for which Cabrera Infante created many of the sections and characters of *Tres Tristes Tigres*.

On the other hand, Carleton Beals, a United States journalist by profession, published numerous books on Latin America, including: *Mexican Maze* (1931) which included illustrations by Diego Rivera; *Banana Gold* (1932), *Fire on the Andes* (1934); and *The Story of Huey P. Long* (1935), among many others.¹⁸ His *The Crime of Cuba* was published in 1933 by L.B. Lippencott Company out of Philadelphia and ran at least three printings during the consecutive years.¹⁹ Beals had already published Latin American oriented titles before *The Crime of Cuba*, ones that contributed to the left-wing platform of having the U.S. step away from Latin America. Although the writing by Beals was primarily journalistic, many of his texts featured a fictional style of blending documented happenings with his interpretation of them. In *The Crime of Cuba* Beals recurs to his strong opposition of U.S. hegemony in Latin America by illustrating the exploitive manner of Machado's dictatorship that was supported by the United States. He disclosed information pertaining to what he claimed were irresponsible connections that the U.S. had in Cuba by funding business ventures. His intent was both to display U.S. participation in Cuba and to motivate revolutionary fervor to oust President Machado.

The task of connecting Beals' text with that of Cabrera Infante's *Tres Tristes Tigres* may seem like a somewhat distant likelihood given the separation of historical time periods between them, yet both texts have similarities in terms of their underlying political ideology and in their textual style. As an avid reader, Guillermo Cabrera Infante had most probably read and studied the work of Carleton Beals. The comparative study of the texts not only opens a can of worms given that it points to an almost identical style of narrating Afro-Cuban culture; but also explores a style that can be described as an essentialist literary performance or textual performance of black culture.²⁰ Beyond this shared trait, the texts also share the commonality of the Havana backdrop as the stage where the representation of the Afro-Cuban narrative is set. The sections that portray this theatrical staging of Cuban blackness arrive unannounced as an organic inclusion to the narrative. The narrative sections, from each of the two authors, are titled accordingly after the Afro-Cuban female protagonist's name, "Fela" and "La Estrella", respectively; concurrently there is a discourse on the physical, the musical, the sensual, and the sexual traits of black Cuban citizens, women and men included.

Although only an assumption, as it is not confirmed, Cabrera Infante most likely read Beals's *The Crime of Cuba* during his formative literary years. Given his revolutionary zeal and activism during the early to mid fifties, Cabrera was well versed in European and North American leftist politics, philosophy, and letters. His journalism and participation in the *Lunes* supplement to the *Revolución* weekly periodical established him as central protagonist within Cuba's intellectual ranks. As director of

¹⁸ See John A. Britton's *Carleton Beals: A Radical Journalist in Latin America*.

¹⁹ See Carlton Beals's *The Crime of Cuba* (1933).

²⁰ Although Beals's journalism has been well documented, research primarily focuses on his socio-political and ideological opinions. The book *Red and Black in Haiti: Radicalism, Conflict, and Political Change, 1934-1957* by Matthew J. Smith (2009), however, sheds light on Beal's work on Haiti and its citizens and can be conducive to approaching the author's reappearing racial discourse.

Lunes (September 1959–November 1961), he contributed to the supplement's concerns of fortifying black culture in to the mainstream in as much as integrating it into erudite and popular culture.²¹ Cabrera Infante had already initiated an Afro-Cuban project onto his politics and creative abilities during the early stages of the revolutionary movement. Some sections of *Tres Tristes Tigres* were written during that time and published within his novel *Vista del amanecer en el trópico*, winner of the 1964 *Biblioteca Breve* prize.²²

The author subsequently revised the novel and its title was changed to *Tres Tristes Tigres* in 1967. Scholar Raymond Leslie Williams in his seminal study *The Post-Modern Novel in Latin America* pays significant attention to the novel, given Cabrera Infante's impeccable use of popular language, also highlighting the literary space where white and black cultures mesh.²³ Considered stylistically revolutionary and radical for its fragmented and non-linear narrative, I argue that its revolutionary identity also lies in its call for radical change within Cuba's racial and class infrastructure. Theoretical work has been published on the novel's key areas: (1) pertaining to intratextual structure, meanings, and discourse analysis [Rodríguez-Monegal, 1973; Souza, 1976, Tittler, 1978; Álvarez-Borland, 1987 & 1991, Roth Chiguluri, 2003]; (2) in connection to the representation of the city of Havana [Gil López, 1991; Domínguez Narez, 2006; Otero, 2007]; (3) as a display of popular culture [Costello, 2007; Rodríguez-Falcón, 2009]; (4) as an ode to the study of Cuban language [Moyano, 2005]; and (5) in connection to Cabrera Infante's mirroring and parodying of other writers [Siemens, 1979; Peavler, 1979; Rowlandson, 2003].²⁴

It has long been held that the book is revolutionary because of its unique intratextual narrative inclusive of a wide-range of characters and stories, which are interwoven into the non-linear plot. The sections pertaining to *La Estrella* (Estrella Rodríguez), which are titled "Ella cantaba boleros," hold similar traits to those of Fela in Beals's narrative and are reminiscent of the styles and texts of other Cuban authors. Although the book is claimed to be imitative of Julio Cortazar's *Hopscotch*, the "Ella cantaba boleros," text parodies the styles of Cuban writers such as Labrador Ruiz, Lino Novás Calvo, and Alejo Carpentier.²⁵ Beyond its creative parodist style the book "blurs

²¹ Scholar Sílvia Cezar Miskulin has written about the importance of *Lunes de Revolución* in her book *Os intelectuais cubanos e a política cultural da Revolução, 1961-1975*. Sao Paulo: Alameda Casa Editorial, 2009.

²² Souza, Raymond D. *Major Cuban Novelists: Innovation and Tradition*. Columbia: U. of Missouri Press, 1976.

²³ Williams, Raymond Leslie. *The Post-Modern Novel in Latin America: Politics, Culture and the Crisis of Truth*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995.

²⁴ This is a partial literature review based on the areas that are most pertinent to the topics of this piece. That said, I would like to point to a recent collection of scholarly essays Guillermo Cabrera Infante: *El subterfugio de la palabra*, edited by Humberto López Cruz (Editorial Hispano Cubana, 2009) which features essays that touch upon Havana as scenic backdrop and character, specifically the chapters by Nivea Montenegro and Axel Presas.

²⁵ Isabel Álvarez Borland in her article "Identidad cíclica de *Tres Tristes Tigres*" which appeared in *Revista Iberoamericana*, 57.154 (1991): pp. 215-233, analyzes the peculiar role that the "Ella cantaba

the boundary between popular and high culture” (Williams, 97) and creates a pastiche narrative that includes performance and media genres within the literary tradition. Cabrera also includes breaks in language style pertaining to the use of Cuban speech in what Williams has labeled as a “virtuoso linguistic performance” (97) based on Antonio Benítez Rojo’s theory on the Caribbean as performance.²⁶

Although *Tres Tristes Tigres* has become a canonical work that many credit to a textual revolution rather than a political one, I argue differently. Scholar William L. Siemens in his essay “Guillermo Cabrera Infante and the Divergence of Revolutions: Political versus Textual” published in *Literature and Revolution* (edited by David Bevan), claims that Cabrera Infante’s text is apolitical; although allusive to the revolution it is primarily a completely fictional piece that revolutionizes literary standards rather than political ones.²⁷ I base this argument, first, based on the fact that the key sections of “Ella cantaba boleros”, which were parts of the first printing of the novel *Vista del amanecer en el trópico*, were formulated in a radical and revolutionary manner since they serve as social commentary on the sad state of the country.²⁸ Although as fictional representations they do not approach political revolution up front, they are symbolic to the changes needed in Cuba. Second, I point to the obsessive focus on tourism and entertainment within Cabrera’s text, one that is connected to the anti-capitalistic and anti-imperialistic feelings shared by most left-wing intellectuals at the time. Third, I propose that both *Vista del amanecer en el trópico* (1964) and *Tres Tristes Tigres* (1967) were created, reformulated, and published during a very implosive time for Cabrera Infante. While he initially pushed in support of the Revolution, subsequently, two years after the triumph of the 1959 Revolution, the building blocks of disenchantment were laid for Cabrera Infante.²⁹ The heaviest blow was most probably the censorship of his brother’s documentary film *P.M.*, which created doubts for the social and artistic freedoms he had pushed for.³⁰ Fourth and last, are the comparisons with the text *The Crime of Cuba* by Carleton Beals presented in this piece, which utilize

boleros” sections hold within the book, given that they do not appear in the index of the book. This can be meaningful given the censorship process through which the manuscript went through in Spain.

²⁶ The theories pertinent to the Caribbean as performance are derived from *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Post-Modern Perspective* by Antonio Benítez Rojo.

²⁷ Siemens, William L. “Guillermo Cabrera Infante and the Divergence of Revolutions: Political versus Textual.” *Literature and Revolution*. Atlanta: Rodopi. 1989.

²⁸ Isabel Álvarez-Borland describes the “overtly political contents” (29) of the revised edition of *Vista del amanecer en el trópico* in her book *Cuban-American Literature of Exile: From Person to Persona*. Although this demonstrates Cabrera Infante’s interest in narrating the politico-national, specifically that revolutionary, Álvarez-Borland’s commentary is based on the most recent and revised version of *Vista del Amanecer en el trópico* published in 1974.

²⁹ See the article by Rachel Roth Chiguluri for a detailed biographical account of Cabrera Infante’s personal circumstances during those years (250-253).

³⁰ The documentary *P.M. (Pasado Meridiano)* directed by Orlando Jiménez-Leal and the author’s brother Sabá Cabrera Infante was censored by Castro in 1961, creating a rupture in the intellectual and cultural scope of the Revolution.

a similar style and content, and share the common thread of a transgressive (yet subverted, in the case of Cabrera Infante) criticism. This is so for Cabrera Infante given that in order for the novel to be published in Spain it needed to be revised in order to pass through the examination imposed by Francisco Franco's Spanish censors. For this reason it is my position that the narrative-style utilized is nevertheless politically inclined.³¹

A first reading of Cabrera's text frames the landscape of Havana and creates an allegorical, playful, and tropical imagery of Cuba. It narrates fictionalized nightlife and introduces characters such as La Estrella, Bustrófedon, and Arsenio Cué, amongst others. However, as many of the aforementioned critics have found, there are many layers to the text; among them, seven narrated versions of the death of Leon Trotsky are featured within the storyline. Many see the novel as a performance that stages Cuban national identity as well as the Cuban situation of the time. In his interpretation of the novel, Ernesto Gil López underlines the first performance as that of the tongue twisting title, *Tres Tristes Tigres*, and its corresponding subdivision titles, which maintain similar leitmotifs of rhyme and linguistic play, including the names of characters such as Delia Doce (55-6).³²

Through Cabrera Infante's use of the literary performance of black culture, it is evident that there is a discourse on revolutionary process. This discourse takes shape by observing the ways through which he built his imaginary on Cuba, specifically the relation between Havana's cultural prominence and Afro-Cuban culture, which had traditionally been represented along the vein of the popular. The political and ideological manifestations are not direct but rather implied through the use of the fictional commentary that appears throughout the book's vignettes (or storylines). Among these, is included the aforementioned one, titled "Ella cantaba boleros," which is also symbolically and stylistically correlated to and reminiscent of Cabrera Infante's brother's film documentary *P.M.*, because of its polemical role in the representation of Afro-Cuban street culture and its subsequent censorship. It is recognized that the "Ella Cantaba Boleros" vignettes were created based on and in response to those issues. Gil López points to the same connection pertaining to the reasoning behind Cabrera's narrative (56). He figures the text was Cabrera's response to the censorship of *P.M.*, an overt motive that led him to embark on denouncing Cuba's situation (before and after the Revolution of 1959), specifically the politics surrounding the treatment of Afro-Cuban culture. Historian Hugh Thomas in his *Cuba or the Pursuit of Freedom* also situates the *P.M.*'s censorship as a dilemma for the thriving intellectual movement of the times (1713).³³ Even Cabrera himself has claimed that "Ella cantaba boleros" was a

³¹ Emir Rodriguez Monegal and Susan Homer provide key observations as to how "to read" and "not to read" Cabrera Infante's novel, particularly pointing to Cabrera Infante's intention of having readers "reconstitute...the real story of these trapped tigers and of their friends" (21).

³² López, Ernesto Gil. *Guillermo Cabrera Infante: La Habana, el lenguaje y la cinematografía*. Tenerife: act Cabildo Insular de Tenerife. 1991.

³³ Thomas, Hugh. *Cuba or the Pursuit of Freedom*. DaCapo. 1998.

continuation of *P.M.* by another means.³⁴ This assertion is symbolic for a few reasons: first, it re-confirms a connection between the texts *Tres Tristes Tigres* and *P.M.*, and second, it points to the probability of an intent of staging black street culture in Havana within a counterrevolutionary and evidently political discourse of representation.

Siemens points to another possible connection to the text's consideration as an instrument of revolutionary symbolic. He situates Jean-Paul Sartre's visit to Cuba during 1960, a time during which a young Cabrera Infante (in the company of other young writers of the time) discussed narrative stylistics as well as social and ideological meanings within literature. During the visit, Sartre shared his newest adherence to "a new literary hybrid concept that he had fabricated out of the raw materials of Marxism and existentialism, which he called a "revolution with no ideology" (110). This type of revolution "with no ideology" could be connected to the philosophical platform used by Cabrera Infante, one that denounced both political sides and focused on the issues pertinent to the social and political changes needed. Siemens claims that Cabrera Infante embraced this idea in his first book *Así en la paz como en la guerra* (1960) where he formulated vignettes that tackled specific injustices of the Batista dictatorship (110).³⁵ Those vignettes later became the famous segments "Ella cantaba boleros", within *Tres Tristes Tigres*. They focused on Havana life, specifically featuring a cast of characters that were representative of the nation's microcosm within the capital city. The vignettes included manifestations of Cuba's popular cultural imaginary and correlated Cuban life as performance. Cabrera Infante's "Ella cantaba boleros" played out the Cuban drama pertaining to the historical, social, political, and cultural realms of the nation, issues that may be related to the perpetual dealings with the ramifications of post-colonialism, including racial inclusiveness.

In "Ella cantaba boleros" when La Estrella first appears she is described as "era una mulata enorme, gorda gorda, de brazos como muslos y de muslos que parecían dos troncos sosteniendo el tanque del agua que era su cuerpo" and the narrator clearly explains that "la mujer parecía dominar el *chowcito*" (63).³⁶ La Estrella's *mulata* description is reminiscent of Fela from the Beals text, as will be discussed further in this piece. El *chowcito* is a Spanish language Anglicism based on the English "show" which in Cuban denotes not only the "act" of the situation but also the "drama" involved. La Estrella was literally and figuratively the star of the show or the center of the "drama" that was situated in the nightclub. The narrator expresses the need to define *chowcito* as "era el grupo de gente que se reunía a descargar en la barra, pegados a la vitrola, después que terminaba el último show y que descargando se negaban a reconocer que afuera era de día y que todo el mundo estaba ya trabajando..."(65). By including the

³⁴ Cabrera Infante, Guillermo. "Cave Attemptor!!!: A Chronology of Guillermo Cabrera Infante (After Laurence Sterne's). *Review* 72. 1972.

³⁵ These ideas are also discussed in the chapter "Los comienzos: *Así en la paz como en la guerra*" in the book by Ernesto Gil López (25-26).

³⁶ The citations included in this piece come from the edition published in 1970. Cabrera Infante, Guillermo. *Tres Tristes Tigres*. Barcelona: Seix Barral. 1970.

derivative of the word “show” and by defining it, Cabrera establishes there is meaning associated with the spectacle aspects surrounding the activities of La Estrella. She becomes the *chowcito*; an instrument that aids Cabrera’s staging technique. El *chowcito* is translated as La Estrella’s performance; musical, sensual and decadently tropical. The descriptions of La Estrella use the shape of physicality for its staging.

Pues allá en el centro del chowcito estaba ahora la gorda vestida con un vestido barato, de una tela carmelita cobarde que se confundía con el chocolate de su piel chocolate y unas sandalias viejas, malucas, y un vaso en la mano, moviéndose al compás de la música, moviendo las caderas, todo su cuerpo de una manera bella, no obscena pero si sexual y bellamente, meneándose a ritmo, canturreando por entre los labios aporreados, sus labios gordos y morados, a ritmo, agitando el vaso a ritmo, rítmicamente, bellamente, artísticamente ahora y el efecto total era de una belleza tan distinta, tan horrible, tan nueva que lamenté no haber llevado la cámara para haber retratado aquel elefante que bailaba ballet, aquel hipopótamo en punta, aquel edificio movido por la música (64).

Prior to the actual performing of her song, the description of La Estrella is already a performance staged by Cabrera Infante. The description of skin and lips as well as the movements are compatible to that of Fela in Beals’s text. The physical movements are similar, yet for Fela the dance is spiritual while for La Estrella the beat of the music creates the body rhythm. Cabrera also provides insight into the social class of La Estrella by describing her unglamorous worn clothing. Although La Estrella becomes “a star” she is still contextualized by her positionality of black and poor. Cabrera claims that her cheap and mousy dress is undecipherable from her skin color. His discourse could be interpreted as the descriptions that would be observed by a touristic visitor or by a (white) Cuban of a specific social class.

In the bar a drunken character tells La Estrella about the importance of black culture to Cuba. The character symbolically portrays the general opinion that Afro-Cuban culture is an “essential” part of Cuban culture. This aside points to irony of this general opinion of the importance of black culture that does not transcend into the social practice of equal rights. Rather the idea remains in the realm of cultural practice, one that considers encompassing “Cuban” culture but in reality leaves out the social-political realities of Afro-Cubans. Cabrera Infante, like Beals, resorts to utilizing essentialist formulas, vehicles of the popular, in order to bring to light the perpetual use of Afro-Cuban culture as exotic.

Cabrera continues to elaborate the implications brought about racial representation and the popular by making allusions to the differences between popular music and elite musical styles. This is noted further within the literary intertext, as a *rumbera* finishes her dance and La Estrella bursts into song, a cappella. The narrative describes La Estrella’s performance and enters into a discussion of the music in Cuba. Contrary to the contemporary music style known as *feeling* (popular at that time) characterized as romanticized, slow and sappy, more in line with white and elite Cuban culture, La Estrella begins to let out soulful guttural melody, connected to African heritage.

Y sin música, quiero decir sin orquesta, sin acompañante, comenzó a cantar una canción desconocida, nueva, que salía de su pecho, de sus dos tetas, de su barriga de barril, de aquel cuerpo monstruoso, y apenas me dejó acordarme del cuento de la ballena que cantó en la opera, por que ponía algo más que el falso, azucarado, sentimental, fingido sentimiento en la canción, nada de la bobería amelcochada, del sentimiento comercialmente fabricado del *feeling*, sin verdadero sentimiento y su voz salía suave, pastosa, líquida, con aceite ahora (67).

Cabrera points to the differences between La Estrella's soulful melody innately of African heritage and the commercialized romantic *feeling* genre which, as Cabrera informs has been commercially fabricated to be the elite musical preference. He indicates that Cuban cultural identity privileges white culture while at the same time maintaining black culture as popular national allegory. La Estrella *no canta más que boleros* (68), only sings boleros, a statement which informs of a limit to her capacities. One cannot claim whether La Estrella just "doesn't" sing anything but boleros or rather she "cannot" sing anything but boleros. Cabrera creates a racially based hegemonic positioning that formulates the relations of Afro-Cubans with and within "culture".

It is important to note that Cabrera's piece "Ella cantaba boleros" has had a historical ripple effect on both the cultural and literary imaginary of Cuba. The character of La Estrella has gained a mythical popularity in the history of mid-twentieth century Havana culture. In August 2001, a short article titled "Freddy cantaba boleros" written by Arsenio Rodríguez, the famous Cuban musician appeared on the website www.cubaencuentro.com.³⁷ The article, posted under the music division, gives a biographical sketch of Fredesvinda García Herrera, who had died forty years earlier, and was the real-life singer on which Cabrera Infante based his character. Freddy, as she was called, had a brief career due to her untimely death, yet she did produce one record, which became a hit after frequently appearing at the Bar Celeste in Havana. During her lifetime, she had appeared on radio with Benny Moré and Celia Cruz. Rodríguez also mentions that her Freddy persona was transposed into another novel, *Dime algo sobre Cuba*, written by Cuban exile writer Jesús Díaz. This also is indicative of the significance that Freddy, the real person, and Cabrera's character created throughout the cultural imaginary of Cuba.

In his book *Guillermo Cabrera Infante: La Habana, el lenguaje y la cinematografía* scholar Ernesto Gil López offers an explanation to the literary importance of La Estrella's performative:³⁸

Y es que Estrella Rodríguez es mucho más que una negra gorda: ella convierte esos boleros que canta en transmisión de sentimientos que, como afirma, van

³⁷ Rodríguez, Arsenio. "Freddy cantaba boleros". www.cubaencuentro.com. August 2001.

³⁸ López, Ernesto Gil. *Guillermo Cabrera Infante: La Habana, el lenguaje y la cinematografía*. Tenerife: Act Cabildo Insular de Tenerife. 1991.

del corazón a los labios y de los labios al oído. Por sus canciones, que prefiere a cantar en voz limpia, sin acompañamiento, podemos considerarla una personificación del folklore popular, que aúna los aspectos de la negritud Africana, llevada a la fuerza a Cuba, con los autóctonos de la Isla. (72)

Gil López alludes to popular culture or folklore to explain the personifications attached to La Estrella. He also takes into account her symbolic composition within Cuban Africana, yet doesn't expand on the significance of Cabrera's meaning behind this portrayal. It is my position that although Cabrera Infante chooses to illustrate or stage these Afro-Cuban descriptives as popular or folkloric culture (mostly) in order to counter the restrictions on the expression of Afro-Cuban culture at the time (given the censorship by the Castro government), this staging is also maneuvered in order to point to Afro-Cuban civic and social positionality at the time. Gil López's interpretation points to the meanings that La Estrella personifies, a folkloric portrayal of black Cuban culture, yet his proposal does not consider any symbolic use of the character beyond the popular. He does not entertain the idea that La Estrella may be a narrative device utilized in order to point to issues throughout the Cuban social realm. Gil was not alone, however, as most scholars, even through the 1990s, did not take note or wonder about the underlying meanings of Cabrera Infante's purposeful display of Afro-Cuban popular culture and the possible socio-political meanings that may lie within his discourse.³⁹

Cabrera Infante's discursive politics point to a call for change.⁴⁰ One may question the excessive characterization of black, yet it seems plausible to consider that the exaggerated descriptives on racial composition are a play on or a parody of the general trend that allegorized black culture as a popular formula during that time. One may also cite Cuban *choteo* or humor as innate characteristics in Cabrera Infante's work. Humor may in fact be one of the formulas that Cabrera Infante uses to parody the representational situation connected to black culture. Nevertheless, *Tres Tristes Tigres* is a post-modern tale that represents a specific moment of Cuban history and a play on the state of Cuban culture at the time, yet one that may still have more layers to analyze than had been previously been considered.

Carleton Beals' book *The Crime of Cuba* was published in September of 1933, and contained thirty-one photographs by Walker Evans, who was a relatively well-known photographer at the time and who soon thereafter became one of the foremost

³⁹ Gil does claim, however, that La Estrella's refusal of instrumental accompaniment may be in defense of the purity of popular music, free from technical deformities (72).

⁴⁰ Scholar Rachel Roth Chiguluri in her article titled "The Politics of Discourse and the Discourse of Politics in *Tres Tristes Tigres*," reviews Cabrera Infante's ideological trajectory during that epoch and analyzes how the process of censorship that the author went through in order to publish the manuscript in Spain (given Francisco Franco's governmental structure) also "changed his intentions" for the book, riding it of "overt political or historical problems" (254). Nevertheless, Roth Chiguluri argues, "the aesthetic intention of the work can be viewed as a way of subverting the political requirements of the censor (254)," an observation that supports my arguments about the widely nuanced aesthetic intention of the novel, one in which politics nevertheless plays a discursive role.

photographers of early twentieth century America.⁴¹ Beals was a well-known journalist who published well-documented texts involving his left-wing platform pertaining to revolutionary efforts in the U.S. and Latin America. His goal with *The Crime of Cuba* was to display the injustices of the *machadato* era and the expansion of U.S. imperialism. In his book on Beals, titled *Carleton Beals: A Radical Journalist in Latin America*, John A. Britton, includes pertinent information on the publication of the book.⁴² He reports that although the publication of the book appeared two weeks after Machado fell from power, the timing was perfect as rising interest in Cuba due to the political instability created a buzz on its release. Britton states: “Lipincott’s managing editor J. Jefferson Jones was highly pleased by the manuscript. He felt that Cuba would be “the next high spot in public affairs” and that Beals’s work had the chance to become the “book of the hour” (112). The complementation of the photography of Walker Evans made the book an even more desirable purchase and the illustrations of Havana, although not appealing, permitted the North American public an inside view to the close neighbor to the south.⁴³ Currently, some of the original editions are very desirable; prices for a first or second edition copy have an average price of about one thousand and three hundred dollars.⁴⁴

In the first section titled “Pattern” Beals narrates what appears to be a description of the Cuban territory filled with colorful details of the shades of the water and fauna. Yet his first sentence states, “The major tones of Cuba are black and white” already alluding to the importance of the racial blends of people. In one specific instance Beals combines the urban landscape with that of his anti-neo-colonial position and his stance on the treatment of black citizens:

A land of negroes toiling to cut the sugar *zafra*, singing songs sorrowful with old and modern slaveries, shaking bodies to the rumba tones of gourd and guitar and clapped hands and anklet bells; whites, proud of their pure Creole extraction, lounging on the wide Yacht Club verandas, gazing now and then with the weariness of centuries in their more pallid veins, across the smooth and vacant sea—this land of black and white, of the whiteness of sugar, crystallized out of black sweat. (20)

⁴¹ A comprehensive analysis of Carleton Beals’ narrative and Walker Evans’ photography is offered in Raúl Rubio’s article, “Afro-Cuban Havana, 1930s: Walker Evans and Carleton Beals in *The Crime of Cuba* (1933),” which appeared in *Caribe: Revista de cultura y literatura*, Volume 12, Summer 2009, 81-101.

⁴² Britton, John A. *Carleton Beals: A Radical Journalist in Latin America*. Albuquerque: U. of New Mexico Press, 1987.

⁴³ In her article “The American City: Havana 1933” (2010), Olga Rodríguez Falcón compares and contrasts the Beals’s narrative and Evan’s photography; particularly pointing to the “differences and similarities in the positioning of black people within the mythologies of both nations” (744) referring to Cuba and the United States. Her argument supports the idea that respectively each artist may have had differing) intentions.

⁴⁴ Prices for original copies of the book are available at www.amazon.com and www.bn.com. Prices run between \$1,300 and \$1,700 depending on the quality of the copy.

This description situates the social climate of Cuba, pointing to the unfair positioning of black citizens within Cuban society. Beals's writing style is in stride with the representational format used in the *antiesclavista* narratives, which represent the world of the *cañaveral* or sugar plantation. However, Beals's voice is in strides with a journalistic discourse that may be interpreted as white, upper class, and intellectually loaded, partaking in the ethnographic codes that were popular at during that epoch.

One of Beals's narrative touchstones is his take on the Cuban situation in relation to its relationship with the United States. As the title indicates, Beals approaches the participation of the United States in relations to Cuba as a crime, while figuratively presenting an illustration of it in a section titled "Pattern." He relates an interview with an old Professor named Miguel de Araunuz, in which he denounces the wrath of U.S. control over Cuba. He quotes the professor as saying, "We are bound by your dollars, by your bankers, by your politicians, by your Platt Amendment... Our government, our President, is but a puppet of your dirty dollars... And that is the crime of Cuba, my friend. That is the crime of Cuba" (34). Within the fictionalized voice of the professor, most likely the voice of Beals, there is the discourse of dissatisfaction with United States imperialist and capitalist ventures, specifically their annexationist efforts within the Western hemisphere. Beals specifically points to the fact that Cuba is still stigmatized by its neo-colonial status, again blaming the U.S. and its own corrupt government.⁴⁵

In the section titled "Black Joy" Beals initiates a non-linear intertextual narrative that describes a racially weighted description of two characters named Fela and Toñico. Toñico, a drummer, has a "black pulpy mandible and fig lips" while Fela is "almost white" with a "tan and gold body" and works at a cabaret fox-trotting with tourists. Beals alludes to her as: "Her grape-snug olive skin covered her complex heritage much more incontiguous than merely that of Navarro in old Spain. But any one more sensitized to Antillean racial vagaries would have noticed in the way she sat the poise of loin and limb not Spanish but African" (40). Beals's characterization of her is in the form of a hybrid vessel, *mulata*, a mix of indigenous, African, and European races. Although Fela is described as one shade away from white, she is *mulata* nevertheless, and her performative descriptives follow suit to the historical legacies of African culture in Cuba. Toñico on the other hand was "a big hunk of night, a mountain of darkness, beefy shoulders, sledge-hammer arms...a form not white" (41). The descriptions of Toñico are animalistic and nature-driven, coupled with suffering, and accompanied by beats of the mythic drum. Beals's representation is such:

Toñico's beat became deafening; at intervals in the chanting, from his great gaping mouth and chest burst forth animal-like roars—guttural agony of the soul in lashing slavery in sweating cane-fields, soul defying God, fate, cursing the vast

⁴⁵ For a comprehensive study pertaining to these topics consult Raul Rubio's article "Afro-Cuban Havana, 1930s: Walker Evans and Carleton Beals in *The Crime of Cuba* (1933)."

throttling hand of nature at the throat of desire, an enormous plaint coupled with the need to be free (42).

While Toñico drummed a “remote jungle time-beat” (40) providing the essential African rhythms, Fela, the female protagonist dances and enters into a state of Lucumí spiritual connection with the deities.

Her face had grown deathly expressionless, vacant eyes rolling up in mesmerized inwardness, lush red lips drawn down in a half-curve of symbolized suffering; her arms were stiff elbows crooked out, hands rigid, fingers tight together pointing, thumbs sticking up. (Have you ever seen a black mammy munching an apple held in the full palm?) Fela’s feet scarcely moved, but her body became an instrument of racial purpose quite beyond herself (42).

Beals describes her movements with an understanding of the levels of body changes that involve the dances of African heritage. By situating the spiraling or rippling movements of curves, quivers, hips, and hands a bodily performance symbolically summarizes what Beals labels “feminine, womanly mystery, motherhood, wifely fidelity, and coquettish abandon” (43). Interestingly, Beals’s descriptions of Fela are detailed with feminine and religious characteristics, while his discourse presents her in a choreographed manner that seems staged based on his interpretation of the dance.

Most symbolic is the change of rhythm at the climax of this scene, when Toñico changes the beat of the drum and then Fela’s motions become animalistic, sexualized, and they quicken almost to a point of fury. Later, as she returns to normality she sinks into a chair returning to her glass of beer. Ironically, Beals’s description goes from a climactic religious moment to the bar scene. Afro-Cuban dance is presented as an expression of freedom, symbolic to the liberty of slavery. Beals describes Fela’s return to normality as a return to white: “Unexpectedly Fela began singing white melodies, only a faint trace of Negro—octaroon songs. There was a hint of defiance in her monodies, as if she wished to be reclaimed back to her whiteness” (44). Beals claims this is due to her “inter antagonism of bloods and culture” (44) given her hybrid or *mulato* state of both black and white.

The site of entertainment, a Havana bar in this situation, becomes a stage for a black performative. The audience, not described in the narration, may or may not be white, Cuban or specific. However, the observer is Beals, an outsider, a North American visitor who partakes in the narrative. This narrative could be taken as a play on an ethnographic study since readers are led to believe that this scene is a true happening. Beals relates to the readers in the opening of the sequence that he had interacted with Fela before her performance. He offers her a drink of cognac at first and Bacardi later, yet she turns them down and demands beer. This interaction between Beals and Fela may be symbolic of the relations between the U.S. market and Cuba; specifically those sites of the touristic enterprise which establishes Havana nightlife as a source of entertainment.

The significance of the Fela character is described by Britton in *Carleton Beals: A Radical Journalist in Latin America* as “an octoroon who used her physical charms to coax drinks, dances, and money from male American tourists” (112). This description alludes to Cuba’s touristic relationship to the United States, particularly the consumption of exoticized black Cuban culture. It is imperative to Beals to indicate that the marketable strategy of selling the Cuban black imaginary is representative of the sale of Cuba itself. In support of my argument, Britton claims that Beals “created an overly dramatic and perhaps exaggerated word-picture of Fela as a symbol of Cuba’s heterogeneous ethnic composition” (113).

As previously analyzed, this literary mechanism is also utilized by Cabrera Infante; where both authors re-create scenes in the urban realm of Havana, particularly in nightclubs and lounges in order to illustrate the entertainment customs of that epoch. The textual trajectory of both Beals and Cabrera Infante moves from a choreography that utilizes a set of Afro-Cuban descriptors, which include, skin color, body traits, the practice of religious rituals, musical characterizations, sexuality, and debauchery, to a discourses that imply the economical and political misgivings associated with not only the enterprises of entertainment and tourism but also Afro-Cuban social positionality.

In another sequence, for example, a Spaniard called Viriato, part of the Cuban underworld, and his counterpart, a Congo Negress called Josefina, partake in a dance that integrates the different cultures in order to make a point about the popular representations of Cuban identity. Beals first alludes to Viriato’s expertise in rumba dancing, pointing to the rumba craze that had been thriving worldwide based on the Cuban dance. Then Beals integrates a description of a performance of the Lucumí Afro-Cuban religious tradition; a practice related to the religious and cultural expression of Africans, symbolic of those practiced when they were seeking freedom from slavery. Beals ironically connects this Lucumí tradition to the rumba craze that was taking place in Cuba, in order to point to the merchandising of heritage traditions.

In the “Black Joy” chapter, Beals moves from the exoticized narratives mentioned above to an anthropological description of *ñañigo* culture, a secret black society. In a piece titled “Gangás” within the section of “Black Joy” Beals uses an ethnographic discourse and reports: “Little by little I had penetrated into various negro reunions” (Beals, 51). These ethnographic descriptions give an air of an imperialist discourse towards Cuban culture, specifically referring to the United States and Cuba’s own use of national culture as an exoticized commodity. His discourse also reflects the ethnographic travelogue of the times, which documents the authenticity of a culture by “penetrating” it.

Beals then explores the historical facts of the racial composition of Cuba in relation to the slave trade of the black Atlantic. In his section titled “Black Cuba” (55) he reports that as early as 1517 slaves were introduced to Cuba. He then formulates a descriptive narrative describing the different African groups that were thriving in Cuba and accredits each regional group with physical characteristics and personality traits, much in line with the racial scientific discourse that was prevalent at the time. In the

section titled “Pigment” (59) he comments on racial hybridity within the Cuba. He lists the historical context of black movements in Cuba and claims that there have been no purely Negro revolts (59). This historical charge seems to point the finger at Afro-Cubans as much as to the whites that enslaved them. In sections like these Beals’s arguments seem non-conclusive and extreme although his narrative continues to express great interest in understanding Cuba’s political and civic evolution while pointing to the injustices relevant to the current political and social situation.

Within the section titled “Sóngoro Cosongo”, a tribute to the poet Nicolás Guillén, one of the Cuban practitioners of essentialist representations, Beals includes journalistic data on what he calls “negro” Cuban cultural developments of the epoch. (64-5). He mentions the musical work of Moisés Simón and the *vanguardista* art movement as well as the folklorist Fernando Ortiz and journalist Gustavo E. Urrutia, who “has turned public attention to basic facts in the negro problems of Cuba” (65). These mentions support the idea that Beals’ utilizes the formats of those Cuban writers and artists in order to parody their essentialist style. The narrative sections that fall within the “Black Cuba” chapter create an ode to the current state of Cuban culture and have no trace of the satiric and parodist style as that of the “Black Joy” chapter.

The serious discussion of black culture in these sections serves as a counterpoint to the playful metaphorical performative of “Black Joy”. Within these sections Beals expands seriously on the cultural flourishing of black culture in Cuba. He contextualizes black culture with the writings of Guillén, Ortiz, and Urrutia and formulates an examination of the concrete evidence of the national composition of black beyond the stereotypes. By observing the seriousness by which he approaches these sections, readers are able to decipher that the previous narrative sections are purposefully presented in order to parody the ways in which Afro-Cuban culture had been represented previously. Although some would argue that Beals’s discourse might be related to a white, upper class, imperialist outlook, I argue that Beals purposefully utilizes that discourse in order to demonstrate the romanticized gaze that foreigners create and which Cubans had been appropriating in order to perpetuate a Caribbean tropics motif staged as national identity. As seen previously, Cabrera Infante also makes use of this parodist style within the “Ella cantaba boleros” sections of his novel.

In the section “White Cuba” there are details of the colonial period, specifically pertinent to the divisions of social class during the Spanish rule (67-73). Beals goes on to mention the epoch of the twenties in Havana where American capital and credit were essential within the economy of Cuba. He claims that the Cuban creoles had been “shoved aside” to Americans and Europeans, Spaniards specifically, as strongholds within the Cuban business world. He goes on to explain that the Cuban creole: “never has had too defined a role in Cuban independence life, certainly none comparable to that in other Latin American countries. He came too late on the world scene” (Beals, 75). Here Beals re-contextualizes the colonial history of Cuba and creates an argumentation toward the neo-colonial stratifications that are formed by U.S. intervention. Although Beals does not specifically allude to the position of black Cubans here, he makes a general commentary to the positionality of creole Cubans under the

imperial powers. By this, he traces the disadvantaged positionality of creole black Cubans that stream from the colonial context.

In comparative terms the texts of Beals and Cabrera Infante are similar in political, cultural, and stylistic terms yet different given their specificity in connection to their particular historical timeline. They create, however, a similar use of the non-linear intertextual narratives that utilized the popular essentialist representation of black Cuban culture as a means of pointing to the Cuban social realm in relation to the injustices of racial inequality. They are both formulated with an ideological agenda yet, as such, significantly created in a format that offers an opportunity to re-consider the cultural nuances of the national projects that intended to offer a national identity concept. Perhaps the intentions of Beals and Cabrera Infante, in terms of parodying the popular, can best be summarized when working through the meanings associated with the title of the book by scholar Robin D. Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness*. Their discursive representation allowed insight to how Cuba was dealing with the issue of the “black national” during the 1930s through 1950s. Their formulas expressed a nation comprising of diversity and historical complexities, one, which unjustly perpetuated formulaic stereotypes of Afro-Cuban culture, rather than taking up the task of fostering social-political change. One can infer that during those years the “popular” aspects of representing and commodifying black culture sadly relied more on stereotypes than on the social-political realities associated with that heritage. Beals and Cabrera Infante framed this unfortunate reality through an aesthetic mode, which parodied the popular representations of Afro-Cubans. The choice by Beals and Cabrera Infante to parody the traditional representational discourse of black Cuban culture can be considered stylistically revolutionary. Their literary aesthetic and the representational discourses portray the Havana landscape as a key protagonist of their texts, and also a site through where manifestations of Afro-Cuban culture were not only a means of the popular but were also expressions that called for revolutionary change.

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