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Miller, Marilyn

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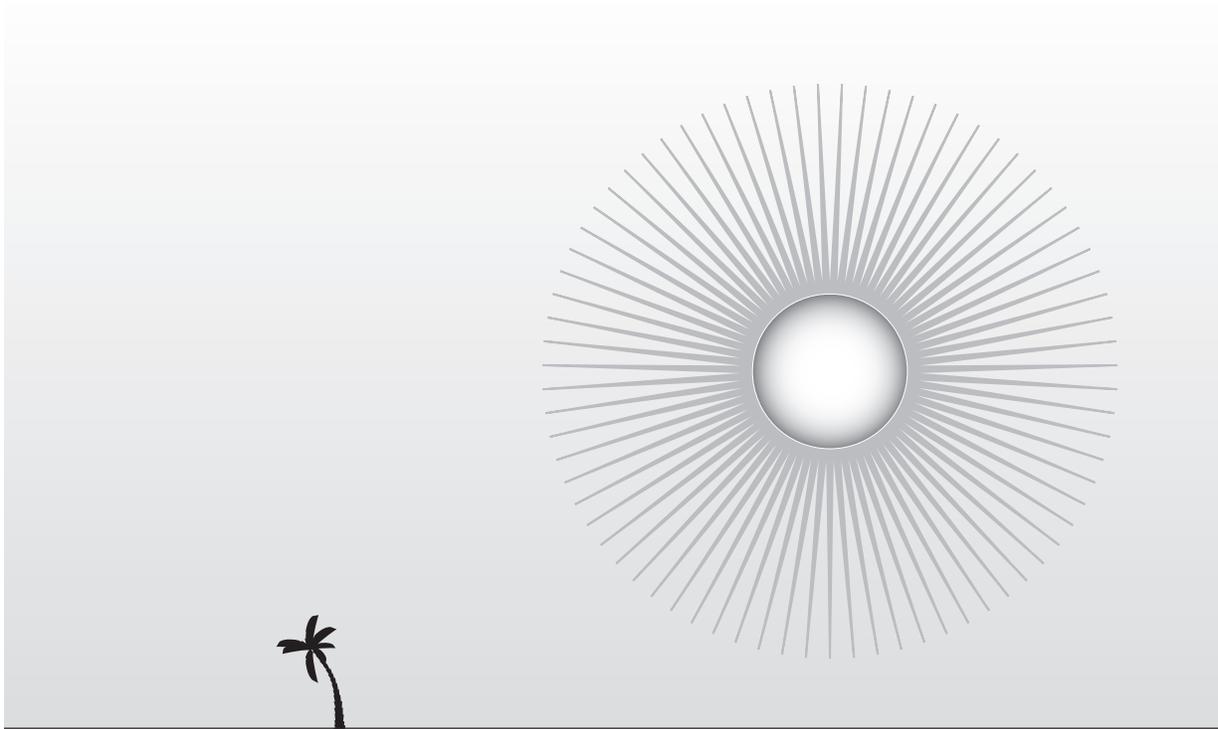
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**PLENA**  
*born in the Sun*

El amor a la música popular, en la isla,  
es tan notable que bien puede decirse  
que todas las actividades y pensamientos  
están saturados de cadencias.

María Cadilla de Martínez 1999 [1933]<sup>1</sup>

***La plena y lo puertorriqueño***

In their popular *plena* titled “Cimarrón,” Los Pleneros de la 23 abajo sing the following verses:

|                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| El negro con tumbador          | The black with his big drum                        |
| Se fugó pa' la montaña         | Fled to the mountains                              |
| El indio y su tamboril         | The Indian with his little drum                    |
| Y el jíbaro cuatro y guitarra  | And the <i>jíbaro</i> his <i>cuatro</i> and guitar |
| La Luna va a reventar          | The Moon is going to burst                         |
| en su noche plenaria           | in its night of <i>plena</i>                       |
| Juntaron sabiduría             | They brought together wisdom                       |
| Se formaron las tres razas     | The three races were formed                        |
| Jíbaro, África, taína          | <i>Jíbaro</i> , African, Taíno                     |
| El indio que no se aparta      | The Indian that doesn't disappear                  |
| Se fugó el cimarrón            | The maroon fled                                    |
| Se escondió allá en la montaña | He hid in the mountain                             |
| Se fugó el cimarrón            | The maroon fled                                    |
| Se escondió en la montaña      | He hid in the mountain <sup>2</sup>                |

The refrain “Se fugó el cimarrón” (The maroon or runaway slave fled) is repeated several times with different responses, until the final verses of the song, when the *plenero mayor* or main voice sings “Se fugó el cimarrón” and the chorus responds with him “Y nació la plena” (and the *plena* was born). In “Cimarrón,” Los Pleneros de la 23 abajo offer us a microhistory of the *plena*, one that associates the form first with *el negro*, then with *el indio*, and finally with *el jíbaro*, Puerto Rico's rural homesteader, cowboy, gaucho, *guajiro*, a figure usually represented as “white” (González 1980: 21). In this racial genealogy, the element of resistance plays an important role, because *el negro* is a *cimarrón*, and *el indio* “no se aparta,” that is, he refuses to leave, surviving

as “a *bomba*, but with portable instruments” (1994: 23). While the *plena* is considered a quintessentially Puerto Rican phenomenon at the level of popular social discourse, music historians nevertheless point to the presence of similar rhythms and instrumentation in the Dominican Republic and Jamaica (Dufrasne González 1994: 25), Haiti and Barbados (Echevarría Alvarado 1984: 66, 73), and in other locales, such as the Virgin Islands and St. Kitts (*Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*). Besides its signature rhythm and dance forms, the *plena* also provides a rich history in terms of lyrics.<sup>4</sup> López Cruz finds clear parallels between several early 20th century *plenas* and earlier songs in black vernacular with references to slavery (1967: 70). The historian claims that similar forms called *cantos de plenas* were documented in Santo Domingo from the late 19th century by the Dominican folklorist Flérida de Nolasco (1956: 77). Despite these indications that the *plena* had precedents in the Dominican Republic in the late 19th century, López Cruz (1967: 85) concludes that “el aire juguetón de los acentos de la plena, los polirritmos de sus panderetas, la picardía de sus mensajes, el clima de algazara y alegría con que se desenvuelve, su llaneza y campechanería, su espontaneidad y candidez, todo ello, y algo más, constituye una naturaleza propia de *puro acervo puertorriqueño*” (my emphasis). [The playful airs of the accents of the *plena*, the polyrhythms of the *panderetas*, its picaresque messages, the climate of uproar and joy in which it takes place, its frankness and heartiness, its spontaneity and candidness, all of this, and something more, gives it the character of a *purely Puerto Rican tradition*.]

This glorification of the form and its “pure” Puerto Rican character is seriously called into question, however, by other sources. In a 1988 interview with researcher Ruth Glasser, trumpeter and composer Ernesto Vigoreaux recalled his own experiences playing *plenas* in San Juan-based *conjuntos* from the 1920s on, noting that early *plena* was associated with poverty, lax morals, and “race.” “Upper-class and official mistrust of Afro-Puerto Rican music dated from the times of slavery” and *pandereteros* were sometimes jailed, he noted (Glasser 1995: 174).

The punitive measures officials took against the *plena* not only reflected past and present associations with slaves, rebellions and poor people of color in general but were in response to the form’s off-color or harshly critical words. Branded immoral because of the taint of its origins, the *plena* was a bit like ragtime or the *tango*, other early twentieth-century musical forms that were ‘stained’ by their association with the lower classes, blacks, and brothels (Glasser 1995: 177).

Like the Cuban *son* and *guaracha*, Dominican *merengue* and Trinidadian calypso, “the *plena* lampooned people of wealth and position, criticized government policies, and satirized powerful institutions” (Glasser 1995: 175). Early *plena* topics addressed a variety of social issues, including the development of a “national” identity and resistance to the U.S. presence and imposition of

There are a number of problems with this originary tale of the *plena*, some of which Flores himself alludes to, and some which I would like to explore further. For example, as other historians including Echevarría Alvarado have pointed out (1984: 74–9), some of the earliest practitioners of *plena*—perhaps even the musicians who introduced it in the island—were former slaves and their children, known as *los ingleses* who arrived in Ponce at the turn of the century from various parts of the British Caribbean.<sup>8</sup> Among them were John Clark and Catherine George—variously identified as being from St. Kitts, St. Thomas, and other Caribbean islands. Their daughter Carolina or Carola, and their son-in-law Julio Mora, together fused “the novel strains introduced by *los ingleses* with traditions and styles native to Puerto Rico.” Flores (1993: 88) notes, “Though it is not known how or why, it is clear that the ‘English’ sound caught on in Ponce and sparked the emergence of a new genre of Puerto Rican music.”<sup>9</sup>

Given the complex linguistic politics in Puerto Rico, where the imposition of English was a key factor in the U.S. domination of the island beginning in 1898, the early association of the *plena* with *los ingleses* presents a fundamental difficulty in its subsequent glorification as one of the island’s most authentic “national” expressions, a difficulty not fully addressed in Flores’ essay. It is deeply ironic that the *plena*, which has become such an important symbol of “Hispanic” identity in the face of U.S. cultural pressure, may in fact be the Spanish corruption of the English call to “Play now” or “Play, Ana” (Flores 1993: 88).<sup>10</sup> The *plena* was in fact the product of inter-Caribbean, bilingual interactions, a fact which Flores (1993: 88) indeed describes:

New, ‘foreign’ styles, instruments and practices arrive, attract attention for their newness and find imitations. The role of external sources in the beginnings of *plena* history, which has been ignored in most accounts of the tradition, deserves attention because it points up the regional, Caribbean context for the emergence of twentieth century song forms in all nations of the area: *son*, calypso, *merengue* and many other examples of the ‘national popular’ music of their respective countries were all inspired by the presence of musical elements introduced from other islands.

Given his understanding of the inter-Caribbean connections of the *plena*, it is surprising that Flores does not call more attention to the common denominator in the African or African diasporic experience. Beyond the differences of language, both *los ingleses* and many of their Puerto Rican working-class counterparts were descendants of African slaves who had similar backgrounds and experiences in which African cultural patterns

New York incorporated the new rhythms they heard into the *plena*, once again blurring autochthonous and “foreign” material.

On the other hand, however, sound recordings of *plena* provided a common point of reference and nostalgia for thousands of working-class Puerto Ricans who had migrated to New York and other U.S. cities from different parts of the island. While the official status of *plena* in Puerto Rico was still marked by a certain ambivalence, in the U.S. it was one more ingredient in a new mix that demonstrated once more the importance of popular music in the retention of a sense of identity and belonging for Puerto Ricans who had suddenly become outsiders. Ramón López (2002: 11) notes that:

La migración puertorriqueña fue de una clase obrera y eso determinó la predilección y fortalecimiento de la música popular en las comunidades de Estados Unidos. Por eso se conservó y enriqueció la plena, el bolero y la trova jíbara mientras se creaban nuevos caminos de salsa, jazz y hip hop. El arte musical es el que más une y comunica los dos lados del charco y su lenguaje es común y compartido.

[ The Puerto Rican migration was a working class migration, and that determined the predilection and strengthening of popular music in the communities of the U.S. That’s why the *plena*, the *bolero* and the *trova jíbara* were conserved and enriched, while new directions were being taken in salsa, jazz and hip hop. Music is the art that best unifies and connects the two sides of the ocean and its language is common and shared. ]

In a process that would be repeated later on with the development of so-called salsa music, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and other “Latin” musicians living in New York collaborated to create new versions of their native “folk” traditions. Though the musical quality of the *plena* was arguably enhanced by this process, the 3-minute format of the early 78 rpm recordings also meant that the number of verses in any *plena* had to be limited, so that lyric richness and the depth of political commentary were inevitably adversely affected (Glasser 1995: 182). The *plena* recordings from the second quarter of the twentieth century, especially those of Manuel “Canario” Jiménez, established the genre as a “Latin” form, muting African elements and simplifying its characteristic polyrhythmic foundation (Aparicio 1997: 33).

In the 1940s and ‘50s, the *plena* moved uptown to New York ballrooms, where César Concepción and other orchestra leaders appeared on stage in tuxedos in a

Creo que nuestro prejuicio racial, en la mayoría de los casos, se reduce exclusivamente a un horror irrazonable de ser tomado por mulato. Cada cual teme infundir sospechas de que en su genealogía pueda haber alguna gota de rítmica sangre de color. Se diría que vivimos subconscientemente asustados de pasar por negros bozales, y actuamos como si creyéramos que el mejor medio posible para neutralizar ese temor es el mostrar frecuentemente mezquinas puntas y ñoños ribetes de prejuicios raciales (1974: 41-2).

[ I believe that our racial prejudice, in the majority of the cases, is limited to an unreasonable horror of being taken for mulatto. Everyone is afraid of encouraging suspicions that somewhere in his family tree there might be a drop of rhythmic colored blood. You might say that we live subconsciously afraid of passing for blacks fresh off the boat, and we act as if we believed that the best possible way to neutralize this fear is to frequently display tasteless signs and mean little traces of racial prejudice. ]<sup>13</sup>

Blanco dismisses this fear as unnecessary: Puerto Ricans aren't savages; nor are they blacks (1974: 42). In fact, it's evident that "Puerto Rico es la más blanca de todas las antillas" (Puerto Rico is the whitest of all the Antilles) and few "pure blacks" remain (1974: 43). And the *plena*, which he labels the great-grandson of the *bomba*, is neither black nor savage (1974: 45). The rhythm is "excelencia negra," but, "por todo lo demás la plena es—plenamente—blanca" (in all other aspects, the *plena* is—plainly—white), he declares (1974: 45).

The separation of the "black" and "white" elements of the *plena*, and the subsequent finding that the balance sheet falls to the right (or white) side, is a maneuver that is repeated in other interpretations of "national" culture from the same period, particularly in the glorification of the white *jibaro* as the rural pillar of Puerto Rican history. Blanco goes on to emphasize the *sabor marcadamente hispánico* (markedly Hispanic flavor) of the *plena* melody line, and the relationship between *plena* lyrics and the Spanish romance. The themes—episodes and anecdotes of daily life—are also a product of the Spanish tradition, according to Blanco, so that "en este aspecto, como en la melodía, la plena es de casta española: de vena blanca" (in this aspect, as in the melody, the *plena* is of Spanish stock: of white blood) (1974: 47).<sup>14</sup> But despite this "clear" European heritage, Blanco also finds a "universal tendency" that explains why the *plena* has also been able to incorporate the *areitos*, dances, and other cultural practices of the indigenous inhabitants of

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Mientras bailas, no hay quien pueda<br>cambiarte el alma y la sal.<br>Ni agapitos por aquí,<br>ni místeres por allá.<br>Dale a la popa, mulata,<br>proyecta en la eternidad<br>ese tumbo de caderas<br>que es ráfaga de huracán,<br>y menéalo, menéalo,<br>de aquí payá, de ayá pacá,<br>menéalo, menéalo,<br>ipara que rabie el Tío Sam! (1995: 616). | While you dance, no power can change<br>your soul and spunk.<br>Not Agapitos from down here,<br>not “Misters” from up there.<br>Swerve your stern, mulatta,<br>steer toward eternity<br>that gyration of hips<br>really hurricane gusts,<br>and shake it, shake it,<br>this way and that, that way and this,<br>shake it, shake it,<br>fanning the rage of Uncle Sam! (1995: 616). |
|--|--|

In this rather surprising ending, Palés finds in the *plena*, and especially in the dance of the *plena*, a force that simultaneously attracts and repels Tío Sam. “While you dance,” the voice assures, “no power can change/your soul and spunk”, neither “Agapitos,” that is, Americanized Puerto Ricans, or “místeres,” the North Americans themselves.<sup>18</sup> The use of the verb *rabiar* (to make furious) to describe the power of the dance on the American observer is somewhat ambiguous, suggesting a reaction that ranges from desire to anger to impotence. But Palés clearly saw the *plena*, and Afro-Puerto Rican culture in general, as a powerful tool of resistance. Soon after penning the poem, he urged an audience at the Ateneo Puertorriqueño:

... Tenemos que salvar esto, lo nuestro, de la corrosiva y disolvente presión foránea... Tenemos que salvarlo de Agapito; no del ingenuo Agapito, con el tenducho abierto en la soledad de sus montañas, sino el otro Agapito, del Agapito junior, del Agapito ciudadano, tecnólogo, fomentador y planista, que nos ha caído encima como una plaga de langostas. Ese Agapito que no cree en los valores esenciales del hombre puertorriqueño, carne y hueso de nuestro ser intrínseco... (In Díaz Quiñones 2000: 151).

[ ... We have to save this, what’s ours, from the corrosive and dissolving effects of foreign pressure. We have to save it from Agapito, not the innocent Agapito, with his little shop in the solitude of the mountains, but from the other Agapito, Agapito, Jr., from Citizen Agapito,



demonstrate the dexterity with which Homar and Tufiño bridged or brought together several disciplines at once, including music, plastic and graphic art, literature, and portraiture.<sup>20</sup> Using a range of typographic elements, Homar and Tufiño were able in *Las plenas* to create or simulate rhythms in a graphic environment that further emphasized the pre-eminence of popular music in the construction of a local identity, a phenomenon later explored by critics such as Aparicio, Quintero Rivera, and Flores (Díaz Quiñones 2000: 126, 137).<sup>21</sup> Now considered a cornerstone of the Puerto Rican graphic tradition, *Las plenas* was produced under difficult circumstances: it took a year of printing the portfolios one by one at night to complete the 800 copies, each of which were sold for \$6.50 apiece.<sup>22</sup> Teresa Tío (1995: 21), writing in the catalogue for the 1995–1996 exhibition *El cartel en Puerto Rico* at the Universidad de Puerto Rico in Río Piedras, noted that

Homar, Tufiño, y los pintores de la generación del cincuenta, fueron los que, junto a un importante cuerpo de escritores, ensayistas, poetas, músicos, actores, entre otros, mantuvieron vivo un sentido de auto estima, sacaron del anonimato a los tipos comunes para darles voz y hacerlos tangibles, crearon un repertorio visual significativo que está aún presente en el subconsciente coletivo. Esta contribución a nuestro sentido de identidad y aprecio a los valores de nuestra cultura, se sumaba a una larga tradición de luchas incesantes por defender nuestra identidad tan vulnerable, sobre todo a partir de la invasión norteamericana de 1898 y la frustrada intención de suplantarnos la lengua.

[ Homar, Tufiño, and the other painters of the generation of the '50s were those who, along with an important body of writers, essayists, poets, musicians, and actors, among others, kept alive a sense of self-esteem, and rescued from anonymity a group of common topics, giving them voice and weight, creating a visual repertoire that is still present in the collective unconscious. This contribution to our sense of identity and appreciation of the values of our culture was one more element in a large tradition of an ongoing struggle to defend our vulnerable identity, especially after the North American invasion of 1898 and the frustrated attempt to supplant our language. ]

Assuredly, Flores and others could not have known in the early 1990s of the *plena* revival that would take place in the last years of the 20th century and the first years of the 21st, a resurrection that has touched nearly every cultural venue in Puerto Rico. Although the Festival de Bomba y Plena had been functioning since the early '70s, it wasn't until 1992, on the 500th anniversary of Columbus' arrival in the New World, that the creative sector began to focus attention on the "recovery" of the *bomba* and *plena* as local "indigenous" forms. In 1994, November 19th, the holiday commemorating the discovery of Puerto Rico was declared Día Nacional de la Bomba y Plena, and in early 1995, the San Juan newspaper *El Nuevo Día* published an article titled "Renace la plena" (The *plena* is reborn). In 1996, Los Pleneros de la 21, directed by Juan Gutiérrez, received the National Heritage Fellowship Award of the National Endowment for the Humanities, a rather strange honor given the *plena's* profile as a form used to protest U.S. economic and cultural domination in the island.<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps the most visible effort to recognize the importance of the *plena* amongst other historically significant musical forms can be found in the 2001 multimedia production *Raíces* (Roots), sponsored by the Banco Popular and available in CD, video, and DVD formats (Rosario Cepeda 2001). Incorporating a host of Puerto Rican musicians from both the island and the mainland, *Raíces* presents a history of Puerto Rican music in which *bomba* and *plena* play starring roles, and in which these traditional forms take their place alongside newer phenomena such as rap. Filmed in the ruins of the Central Aguirre in Salinas, *Raíces* enlists groups such as Los Pleneros de la 21 and Plena Libre alongside pop stars such as Marc Anthony, Olga Tañón, and La India to suggest that all forms of contemporary Puerto Rican music are in some way informed by *bomba* and *plena*.

The recent re-emergence of the *plena*, not only in the traditional or neo-traditional work of groups such as Los Pleneros de la 23 abajo, Plenéalo, Plenarium, and others, but also in the performances of Plena Libre in the world music sector and with the internationally known Latin jazz musician Eddie Palmieri, presents an entirely different trajectory than the elegy with which Flores begins his essay, bemoaning the death of Cortijo, Rivera, and, implicitly, the *plena* itself. The *plena* now seems to be ubiquitous, at least in the island, where it has shown up recently in everything from dance productions in the Centro de Bellas Artes by Ballets de San Juan to religious music by Plena Sacra. Plena Libre's *Más libre* (2000) was nominated for a Latin Grammy for Best Traditional Tropical Album alongside recordings by international superstars Celia Cruz and the Buena Vista Social Club, confirming the rhythm's popularity with a wide audience beyond Puerto Rican communities in the island and the U.S.<sup>26</sup> Besides the famous Festival de Bomba y Plena, groups of *pleneros* are regularly enlisted now to play at a wide range of neighborhood and civic events,

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In her foundational work, Cadilla de Martínez (1999 [1933]: 40) describes the *plena* as “otro bailable de difícil clasificación y oscuro origen. Tiene algo de la rumba cubana, pero indudablemente hay ritmos africanos en su música alborotadora. En ellas se cantan temas de la actualidad pero a veces les imprimen cierta modalidad caricaturesca...” [another danceable rhythm of difficult classification and obscure origins. It has something of the Cuban rumba, but there are undoubtedly African rhythms in its turbulent music].

<sup>2</sup> All translations, unless otherwise indicated in the bibliography, are the author’s.

<sup>3</sup> Ortiz (1996 [1955]: 118–9) discusses the *pandero* and *pandereta* in chapter 15 of *Los instrumentos de la música afrocubana*, but does not mention Puerto Rico. The instruments are distinguished from other forms of the drum because their width exceeds their height, and because they are lightweight and portable. The *pandereta* often has *sonajas* or small metal plates that add to percussive capability, making it a close relative, if not synonym, of the tambourine. Ortiz claims that the *pandero* and *pandereta* are not common instruments in Afro-Cuban music, although their use has been documented in Spain and Africa and even earlier in the Roman Empire. He suggests that at certain moments in history, the *pandero* or *pandereta* may have provided a suitable alternative when the authorities frowned on or repressed the use of larger, more obviously “African” drums (1996 [1955]: 120), a suggestion with important implications for the development of the *plena* in Puerto Rico. The few examples of the *pandero* Ortiz finds in Cuba are those used by certain *santeros* in rites associated with Eléggua, particularly in *santería lucumí*.

<sup>4</sup> The basic step of the *plena* is simple, as suggested in this lyric:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Yo te doy un pasito pá ‘lante,           | [I take one step towards the front     |
| tú me das pasito pa tras;                | You take a step back                   |
| eso es lo que a ti te gusta, mi negra... | That’s what you like, my black woman.] |

<sup>5</sup> Frances Aparicio (1997: 32) analyses a version of these lyrics in her chapter “A Sensual Mulatta Called the *Plena*,” pointing out the *plena* can here be read as an allegory of Puerto Rican resistance in the face of the masculine hegemony of the United States, and that the symbol of that resistance is notably female.

<sup>6</sup> Flores’ more recent book *From Bomba to Hip-Hop* (2000) for the most part does not address the *plena* in its examination of the connections and continuum between *bomba* in the island and Puerto Rican hip-hop.

<sup>7</sup> A single endnote to Flores’ essay affirms that “the main source for information on early *plena* is the book by Félix Echevarría Alvarado, *La plena: origen, sentido y desarrollo en el folklore puertorriqueño* (Santurce: Express, 1984),” but perhaps because it is an “unassuming work,” Flores does not cite it directly in the text of the essay. He also notes that a 1988 essay by Jorge Pérez in

connections of the term to voicelessness and suppression, since *bozal* also means muzzle. For colonial slave traders in the Spanish Caribbean, Africans were *bozales* and thus muzzled or inarticulate, if they did not speak Spanish.

<sup>14</sup> *Areito* is a Taíno word that appears (with a variety of spellings) in the work of the earliest Spanish chroniclers living in the Antilles, and refers to indigenous performances that included elements of music, dance, and poetry. Here, Blanco seems to be participating in a tendency, still very common, to accentuate “indigenous” elements of national culture while de-emphasizing African roots.

<sup>15</sup> “Mulatica de tez dorada como ron añejo; de pelo lacio y ojos pícaros que pueden pasar por andaluces; de parla castellana, un poco arcaica; y, de ágil paso sensitivo, como de bestezuela selvática.”

<sup>16</sup> Díaz Ayala (1998: 58) attributes the widespread interest in the *plena* during this period to the articles published by Augusto Coén in the journal *Alma Latina* between 1951 and 1955, which “despertaron el interés público en nuestro país por conocer más a fondo las raíces de este género autóctono” [awakened the public interest in our country in knowing more deeply the roots of this local form].

<sup>17</sup> A version of these same lines appears in Kalman Barys’s short story “La leyenda del cemi” (The Legend of the Cemi) in the collection *Del nacimiento de la isla de Borikén* (1982: 9–19). The children’s story recounts how a piece of rock on the ocean floor wished it could reach the surface. In a certain moment, the rock starts to dance a “plenita,” with the lyrics:

menéalo  
menéalo  
de aquí p’allá  
de allá p’acá  
menéalo  
menéalo

que se te empelota (1982: 10 ff).

Through the movement of the dance of the *plena*, the rock rises to the surface and becomes the island of Puerto Rico. In Barys’s story, not only is the *plena* born in Puerto Rico, but Puerto Rico is born of the *plena*.

<sup>18</sup> Mercedes López-Baralt provides interesting anecdotal information regarding the use of the term *agapito* in “Plena del menéalo”:

A principios de la década del cincuenta hubo en Puerto Rico un bar que se hizo famoso por la controversia que causó el anglicismo de su nombre. La polémica se musicalizó en la canción popular “Agapito’s Bar” que parodiaba la mezcla del español con el inglés [Oh boy, qué champion, atta boy qué colosal, es el Agapito’s special en el Agapito’s bar...]. El contexto de la polémica fue claramente político. Luis Muñoz Marín, el gobernador, se quejó al dueño del bar por su nombre híbrido. Hacía poco que el Comisionado de Educación, Mariano Villaronga, había hecho del español el idioma oficial de la enseñanza pública en el país, en franco desafío a la Ley Foraker, que desde 1900 decretó que fuera el

distribution throughout Latin America. “Queremos que se conozca en esos países hermanos la música nuestra,” Núñez told reporters for *El Nuevo Día* (Viernes, 6 de diciembre de 2002, entretenimiento p. 3). (We want our music to become known in our brother countries.)

<sup>27</sup> The seemingly felicitous coexistence of both flags in the Puerto Rican political imaginary was also evident in the 2002 license plates, which commemorate 50 years’ status as a commonwealth, with the U.S. flag on one side, and the *monoestrellada* on the other.

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2004. Plena and the Negotiation of "National" Identity in Puerto Rico. *CENTRO: Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies* 16(1): 36-59. Valuable English-language article that analyzes the importance of plena in the construction of Puerto Rican identities both on the Island and in Puerto Rican communities in the United States. Filmography: "La Plena." This documentary is a panoramic assessment of various cultural traditions rooted in Puerto Rico since the pre-Columbian era. Of great prominence is plena's Afro-Hispanic input in aspects like Spanish poetry, Arab-Andalusian melodies as well as dance and rhythm improvisation. Valuable video clips feature a strong Afro-Puerto Rican tradition on the verge of disappearance. "Plena is Work, Plena is Song. The Sovereign Colony: Olympic Sport, National Identity, and International Politics in Puerto Rico Hardcover" February 1, 2016. by Antonio Sotomayor (Author). It contributes to the understanding of colonialism where the agency of colonial subjects is emphasized in their negotiations of power structures. . . . A must read for scholars of U.S. and Caribbean history."-Rosa Elena Carrasquillo, *Diplomatic History*. "Sotomayor's impressive volume says not only a great deal about the relationship between Puerto Rico and the US, but can be used in parallel to analyze similar colonial and territorial interrelationships within the geopolitics of global sport."-Matthew L. McDowell, *Spectacular Tableau*. (Matthew L. McDowell *Spectacular Tableau* 2017-04-26). Bomba and plena are percussion-driven musical traditions from Puerto Rico that move people to dance. Often mentioned together as though they were a single musical style, both reflect the African heritage of Puerto Rico, but there are basic distinctions between them in rhythm, instrumentation, and lyrics. You can hear the difference in these songs. Bomba dates back to the early European colonial period in Puerto Rico. It comes out of the musical traditions brought by enslaved Africans in the 17th century. To them, bomba music was a source of political and spiritual expression. The lyrics conveyed a sense of anger and sadness about their condition, and songs served as a catalyst for rebellions and uprisings.