

2013-05-29

The Candombe Drumming of Uruguay: Contextualizing Uruguayan Identity Through Afro- Uruguayan Rhythm

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

THE *CANDOMBE* DRUMMING OF URUGUAY: CONTEXTUALIZING
URUGUAYAN IDENTITY THROUGH AFRO-URUGUAYAN RHYTHM

By

Clifford Todd Sutton

A DOCTORAL ESSAY

Submitted to the Faculty
of the University of Miami
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

Coral Gables, Florida

June 2013

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Contextualizing Uruguayan Identity
Through Afro-Uruguayan Rhythm

(June 2013)

Abstract of a doctoral essay at the University of Miami.

Doctoral essay supervised by Dr. Deborah Schwartz-Kates.

No. of pages in text. (86)

This essay examines the drum rhythms associated with Uruguayan *candombe*, an Afro-Uruguayan music and dance promoted nationally and internationally as Uruguayan cultural heritage. At the heart of this cultural form, both musically and symbolically, is the drum (commonly referred to in Uruguay as *tambor*), along with collective drumming performances known as *llamadas*.

Scholars of Afro-Uruguayan history, culture, and music are quick to acknowledge the significance of the drum to *candombe*, linking it to Afro-Uruguayan discourses and the politics of national identity. However, many of the resources that would assist musicians who are interested in learning and understanding these rhythms and their context in performance are not easily accessible outside of Uruguay and are generally only available in Spanish. Additionally missing from the majority of available works are transcriptions and contextual analyses of these drum rhythms, which would serve to illustrate their musical and cultural significance.

The purpose of this essay is to complement and expand upon existing scholarship dealing with this vibrant musical tradition, specifically through the context of collective drumming performances known as *llamadas*. Based on research conducted in Uruguay from August 2011-April 2012, this study presents materials to aid in understanding basic

candombe rhythms and their application in a variety of musical settings. Additionally, I examine the individual and ensemble rhythms of the *tambores* with respect to their significance as markers of Uruguayan social and cultural identity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It was never easy to express myself in words while living in Uruguay, yet the relationships I formed there remain among the most meaningful in my life. I am indebted to the many *candombe* musicians who demonstrated a tremendous amount of patience with a *yanqui* interested in the drums. To everyone at Organizaciones Mundo Afro (Montevideo, Salto, Rivera), thank you for helping me “see” Uruguay; without the help of Romero Rodríguez and Claudia de los Santos, I might still be trying to get to Montevideo. I am especially indebted to my teacher and friend, Álvaro Salas, whose knowledge of the *tambores* and *candombe* is a constant inspiration.

Many of my fondest memories of Uruguay are those I spent with the Taller de Percusión at Club Huracán Buceo. The first time I touched a *tambor uruguayo* was in the club’s cramped upstairs room on August 11, 2011. Guillermo Ceballos and all the members of the Taller are more than just contributors to this project, they are family. In this regard, I also acknowledge Victoria “Pico” Riñon, who took me to see the Sinfonía de Ansina for the first time, and whose family welcomed me into their home during the holidays when “home” was something I very much missed.

I want to thank the Comisión Fulbright-Uruguay for their support of this project, and for their assistance during my time in Montevideo. The same goes for my fellow Fulbrighters Megan Strom and Kate Ivancic, who both made my final months in Montevideo amazing and memorable. At the University of Miami, I would like to thank the members of my doctoral committee: Deborah Schwartz-Kates, Svet Stoyanov, Thomas Sleeper, Nancy Zavac, and Thomas Keck (especially for agreeing to serve on my

committee on such short notice). I am especially grateful to Deborah Schwartz-Kates, who is responsible for my introduction to *candombe* and who has been a constant source of guidance and encouragement throughout the entire process. I am equally grateful to my percussion teachers at the Frost School of Music—to Ney Rosauro for giving me the opportunity to study at the University of Miami and to Svet Stoyanov for allowing me the space to develop this project. Additionally, there are a few other teachers I would like to thank, particularly for never making the world of percussion a small one: at the University of Florida, Larry Crook and Ken Broadway; and, at the University of South Carolina, Jim Hall and Chris Lee.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family and friends, none of whom I see enough. This includes my significant other, Jenn Tipton. Her patience and support over the last two years has been tremendous, and for that I am extremely grateful.

PREFACE

Music seems to have an odd quality that even passionate activities like gardening or dog-raising lack: the simultaneous projecting and dissolving of the self in performance. Individual, family, gender, age, supercultural givens, and other factors hover around the musical space but can penetrate only very partially the moment of enactment of musical fellowship. Visible to the observer, these constraints remain unseen by the musicians.

—Mark Slobin, *Subculture Sounds*

When I first learned of *candombe* in 2009, my primary interest was in the drums. After beginning my investigation, I was intrigued by the profound role that these instruments and their rhythms play in defining social and cultural identities. However, I was surprised by the lack of materials available to assist in the study of the instruments and their application to musical performance. In the most meaningful studies, it was the “factors that hover around the musical space” that were emphasized. Specifically, *candombe*, the *tambores*, and their rhythms generally served as a means of inserting Afro-Uruguayan history and culture into a national narrative from which they had previously been absent.

In April 2011, I was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship to conduct fieldwork in Uruguay. The majority of the grant period (August 2011-April 2012) was spent in the capital city of Montevideo. During that time, I was experienced *candombe* on a daily basis, which included having a small drumming ensemble parade past my apartment in Ciudad Vieja virtually every day. Twice a week, I attended meetings of the Taller de Percusión (Percussion Workshop) at the athletic club Huracán Buceo in the Malvín neighborhood. Performing with the Taller taught me much more than how to play a *tambor* as part of an ensemble; it was with this group of drummers representing a wide range of ages, races, and abilities that I learned about the significance of community to

candombe. It was there that I grew comfortable with many Uruguayan cultural practices, such as sharing *maté* or giving the traditional kiss on the cheek to both men and women. Ultimately, these experiences led me to feel a sense of belonging. I have often commented on the irony that, as a student at the University of Miami, I would find this sense of community with another group identifying themselves as Hurricanes.

A defining moment in determining the focus of this essay took place on October 2, 2011 while attending an international music conference in Montevideo.¹ Although the theme of the conference was “Music between Africa and the Americas,” the unofficial theme was *candombe*. During the course of these four days, those in attendance heard seven presentations covering the history and music of *candombe* and had the opportunity to attend a *llamada* parade that took place in the neighborhoods of Barrio Sur and Palermo. After a presentation by Luis Ferreira on the penultimate day, Kazadi wa Mukuna, an ethnomusicologist from Zaire and a professor at Kent State University, looked at Ferreira after having heard all of these presentations and asked: “What is [*candombe*]?”

The question posed by Mukuna was the one that I most frequently asked *candombe* participants in the initial stages of this project. Although the answers were often extensive, they were never fully adequate. As I began to write this essay, I came to understand the challenges of presenting a comprehensive analysis of *candombe*. Yet, the most frequent answer to my original question always identified the *tambor* as a vital element in defining this musical and cultural form.

¹ Coloquio Internacional: *La música entre África y América*. The conference was hosted by the Centro Nacional de Documentación Musical Lauro Ayestarán in Montevideo from September 30 through October 3, 2011.

These answers helped me narrow my focus to the practice of the *llamadas*, since they represent the most public manifestation of drum performance, which initially was what drew me to study this music. In focusing on the drumming, this paper aims to shed light on the meaning of *candombe*. More importantly, my hope is to spark interest in this vibrant and powerful Uruguayan art form among drummers, musicians, and audiences in the United States.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES	x
 Chapter	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
<i>Candombe, Llamadas, and Toques</i>	2
Literature Review	5
Methodology	17
2 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT	21
From “Nations” to “Societies”	24
<i>La llamada</i>	29
3 AN OVERVIEW OF THE <i>TAMBORES</i> AND <i>LLAMADAS</i>	37
Organization of the <i>Cuerda</i>	41
<i>Ensayos</i> and <i>Llamadas</i>	42
The <i>Comparsa</i>	44
4 LEARNING TO PLAY THE <i>TAMBORES</i>	49
General Characteristics	50
Pulse and Meter.....	50
Musical Notation and Sounds	51
Individual <i>Tambores</i> and Their Rhythms	53
The <i>Chico</i>	53
The <i>Piano</i>	55
The <i>Repique</i>	57
Transmission and Comprehension.....	59
5 <i>TOQUES</i> OF THE <i>TAMBORES</i>	62
Rhythmic Identity	63
Tempo and <i>Repicado</i>	71
Drumming and <i>Candombe</i> Identity	73
Conclusion	78
GLOSSARY OF SPANISH TERMS	79
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	82

LIST OF FIGURES

2.1	Map of Uruguay	21
2.2	Map of Central Montevideo	27
2.3	Medio Mundo, 1954	28
2.4	Early Twentieth-Century <i>comparsa</i>	30
3.1	<i>Tambores</i>	38
3.2	Tuning by fire	39
3.3	Characteristic stick sizes	41
3.4	Flags and emblems of the <i>comparsa</i> C-1080	44
3.5	<i>Gramillero and mama viejas</i>	45
3.6	<i>Escobero</i>	46
3.7	<i>Vedette</i>	47
4.1	<i>Comparsa</i> Integración	49
4.2	Notation legend	51
4.3	<i>Piano</i> and <i>chico</i> performers with the <i>comparsa</i> Elegguá	55
4.4	<i>Repique</i> with the <i>comparsa</i> La Magia	59
5.1	Promotional flyer for the Llamadas del Patrimonio	65
5.2	Aquiles Pintos, March 2012.....	74
5.3	La Melaza, March 2012	76

LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES

4.1	Basic pulse with sixteenth-note subdivision	51
4.2	Basic <i>madera</i> pattern with variation	53
4.3	<i>Chico liso</i> and <i>repicado</i> patterns	54
4.4	Cuareim and Ansina <i>piano</i> patterns	56
4.5	Common <i>piano repicado</i>	57
4.6	Common <i>repique repicado</i>	58
4.7	Common <i>repique</i> pattern to end a performance	58
4.8	Displaced Ansina rhythm	60
5.1	Base <i>piano</i> transcriptions by Luis Ferreira	64
5.2	Cuareim <i>piano</i> patterns	67
5.3	Ansina <i>piano</i> patterns	69
5.4	Gaboto <i>piano</i> patterns performed by Aquiles Pintos	70

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On December 3, 2006, Uruguay observed the first annual National Day of Candombe, Afro-Uruguayan Culture, and Racial Equality. The celebration was the idea of Edgardo Ortuño, a prominent politician seeking to promote Afro-Uruguayan contributions to Uruguayan history and culture, and, as a consequence, advance discussions concerning issues of racial inequality and discrimination.¹ In a speech presented at this inaugural event, Ortuño defined *candombe* as “a cultural heritage, a native music and dance of Uruguay, created by Afro-Uruguayans, with African roots, and based on the rhythm of the *tambores* (drums) known as *chico*, *repique*, and *piano*.”²

Ortuño’s definition, and indeed the observance of a national public holiday inspired by *candombe*, demonstrates the significant role that the African-based music and dance plays in Uruguayan cultural life. Additionally, his words highlight the rhythm of the *tambores* as the essential musical element in defining *candombe*.

Scholars of Afro-Uruguayan history and culture are quick to acknowledge the importance of the *tambores*, as the drums are visible and powerful symbols of African memory and an enduring Afro-Uruguayan legacy. Yet, missing from previous studies are

¹ Ortuño currently serves as the Subsecretary of Industry, Energy, and Mining; from 2005-2010; he served as a legislator in the Uruguayan Parliament, and was the first Afro-Uruguayan elected to the post. This information was cited from Ortuño’s official biography, which is available online through the website of the Uruguayan Ministry of Industry, Energy, and Mining, <http://www.dne.gub.uy/en/institucional/organizacion-y-funciones/estructura-organica> (accessed March 26, 2013).

² “un patrimonio cultural de música y danza autóctono del Uruguay, creado por los afrouuguayos, con raíces africanas, basado en el toque de los tambores denominados 'chico,' 'repique,' y 'piano.’” Edgardo Ortuño, *Día nacional del candombe: la cultura afrouuguayaya y la equidad racial, diciembre 3* (Montevideo: Ediciones Ideas, Nov. 2007): 10. All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

clear and accessible analyses of what culturally and musically defines *candombe*: the rhythms of the *tambores*. Many of the resources that would assist those interested in learning and understanding these rhythms and their context in performance are not easily accessible outside of Uruguay and are generally available only in Spanish. Many of the studies that present and analyze *candombe* rhythms tend toward a virtuosic display of an individual's technical ability or espouse misleading generalizations about the connections between musical and social identity. Since many of the authors are Uruguayan, they commonly assume that the audience possesses a certain degree of familiarity with *candombe*, as well as with Uruguayan history, politics, and culture.

The purpose of this essay is to complement and expand upon existing scholarship dealing with this vibrant musical tradition, specifically through the context of collective drumming performances known as *llamadas*. Based on research conducted in Uruguay from August 2011-April 2012, this paper presents materials to aid in understanding basic *candombe* rhythms and their application in a variety of musical settings. Additionally, I examine the individual and ensemble rhythms of the *tambores* with respect to their significance as markers of Uruguayan identity.

Candombe, Llamadas, and Toques

It is essential to clarify a few of the Spanish terms that appear throughout this essay. Words like *candombe* and *llamadas* have multiple meanings, and understanding them is not simply an issue of translating the language, but also understanding their musical and cultural contexts. For those who actively participate in these traditions, explanations are not required; however, for those not familiar with *candombe* music and dance, certain terms are often a source of confusion. In this section, I define and clarify

my use of three terms—*candombe*, *llamadas*, and *toques*—that are fundamental to understanding the musical and cultural analyses presented in subsequent chapters.

Etymologically, *candombe* has evolved extensively throughout its history, representing various cultural and musical expressions. During the colonial period, the term generically referred to the music and dance of enslaved Africans and their Uruguayan-born descendants. Since the 1940s, *candombe* has also referred to a popular Uruguayan song form, featuring a musical style based on the rhythmic interactions of the three *tambores*. The earliest forms were associated with tango groups from Montevideo and Buenos Aires. Over time, *candombe* has proven to be a versatile style. Musicians have incorporated Afro-Brazilian and Afro-Cuban rhythms as well as fused the drumming with additional genres such as jazz and rock. During the military dictatorship (1973-85), many Uruguayan popular artists like Alfredo Zitarrosa and Jaime Roos, used the rhythms and spirit of Uruguayan carnival forms like *candombe* to speak out against the oppressive regime.

Although these rhythms are essential to defining *candombe*, musicologists like Luis Ferreira and Coriún Aharonián distinguish between the music of the *tambores* (specifically the three drums known as the *chico*, *piano*, and *repique*) and popular song forms based on the musical interaction of these three instruments. However, while living in Uruguay from August 2011-April 2012, I never heard any drummers or other performers make this distinction; for them, any musical performance involving the drums was considered a *candombe*.

With the *tambores* as the central focus, a *candombe* performance that only features drums is synonymous with the expression, “hacer una llamada” (to make or to

perform a *llamada*). Literally meaning “a call,” the term *llamada* refers to a collective drumming performance that is rooted in the African musical practice of “call and response” that generally takes the form of a parade (*desfile* in Spanish). In the most traditional sense, *llamadas* are considered spontaneous or informal drumming performances. These events are public, and the audience actively participates by singing, clapping, or dancing as they follow the *cuerna* (drumming ensemble) along its established route. Generally, both the drummers and the audience share a connection with the neighborhood in which the *llamada* takes place.

Since the late 1950s, the term has also referred to more organized events, most notably the Desfile de Las Llamadas, or simply, Las Llamadas: a state-sponsored parade that takes place annually during carnival in Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay. This second form differs from the first in that many different *candombe* groups come together to parade one after the other in a central location, and there exists a clear division between performers and spectators.

In both types of *llamada* performances, the composite rhythms, or *toques* performed by the *tambores* serve as a means to establish an aural identity. Of central importance to this investigation are the musical and cultural associations between *toques* and a group of three neighborhoods in central Montevideo for which these rhythms are named. The problem that arises in the use of the term *toque* (literally “a touch,” or a “stroke”) is that, in discussions of *candombe* drumming, the word can refer to rhythmic patterns for individual drums or to the composite rhythms produced by a complete drumming ensemble. In this essay, I have chosen to utilize the word *toque* as a signifier

of a collective musical style, rather than to refer to individual rhythmic patterns as performed on the *chico*, *piano*, and *repique*.

Literature Review

Almost four years after the first National Day of Candombe in Uruguay, George Reid Andrews, a historian from the United States specializing in Afro-Latin American studies, employed *candombe* to unite the historical narrative of his book: *Blackness in the White Nation: A History of Afro-Uruguay*.³ In his introduction, Andrews notes an increase in Afro-Uruguayan studies during the 2000s, “partly in response to the discussions and debates promoted by Afro-Uruguayan activists and intellectuals ... and partly as a result of increasing interest in Afro-Latin American studies throughout the region.” Andrews goes on to indicate that, until now, the majority of the research was only available in Spanish, was primarily conducted by Uruguayans, and was therefore written “within an explicitly national paradigm.”⁴

Andrews makes a significant contribution to the field with *Blackness in the White Nation*. Without failing to acknowledge the racial disparity in Uruguay, he demonstrates the dual nature of *candombe* as both a means of community-building and a source of discrimination, with an emphasis on racial discrimination in Montevideo. In this context, *candombe* drumming connects the complicated historical and social evolution of the form from its African origins to its current status as a defining element of national culture.

³ George Reid Andrews, *Blackness in the White Nation* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2010). In 2011, a Spanish translation of this book was released: Andrews, *Negros en la nación blanca: historia de los afrouuguayos, 1830-2010*, trans. Betina González Azcárate (Montevideo: Linardi y Rossi, 2011).

⁴ Ibid., 19.

The most comprehensive musicological and pedagogical sources are by Uruguayan authors with firsthand experience as participants in *candombe* ensembles known as a *comparsas*. Limited access to these studies is the greatest obstacle faced by non-Spanish speakers interested in learning more about the rhythms of the *tambores*. Aside from the language barrier, many of the studies are not widely available outside of Uruguay, and, in many cases, are out-of-print.

Additionally, since *candombe* is inextricably linked to Afro-Uruguayan discourses, the “national paradigm” that Andrews referenced is often established through an Afrocentric theoretical perspective that presents a one-sided view of the historical and cultural processes that influenced the development of *candombe*. This perspective characterizes many of the most recent studies of the genre that emphasize its music, the most notable of which is *Los tambores del candombe* by Luis Ferreira.⁵

Within the Afrocentric context, Luis Ferreira’s *Los tambores del candombe* is the most extensive study to date that examines *candombe* from an historical, pedagogical, and theoretical standpoint. To accomplish these objectives, Ferreira divides his book into three sections. In the first, he presents the musical evolution of the genre in the context of Afro-Uruguayan history; he also examines aspects of the drums, including their construction and ensemble organization. In the second, he analyzes *candombe* rhythms and their functions, and, in the third, he provides models for the analysis of collective musical performance. Regarding the transcriptions of drumming patterns, Ferreira presents individual interpretations by well-known Montevidean drummers as generalized representations of local identities, in many instances without biographical information about the contributing performers.

⁵ Luis Ferreira, *Los tambores del candombe* (Montevideo: Colihue-Sepé, 2002).

Since the initial release of *Los tambores del candombe* in 1997, Ferreira has continued to investigate the drums and their cultural significance. In two subsequent studies,⁶ he examines Afro-Uruguayan drumming within the broader context of what he refers to as the “Black Atlantic” or “Afro-Atlantic.” In these works, he notates the *candombe* examples using the time unit box system (TUBS) that was developed by the ethnomusicologist James Koetting in order to make the transcriptions more accessible to audiences who lack the ability to read standard musical notation.⁷ Particularly interesting are Ferreira’s comparisons of *candombe* rhythms with similar patterns from Cuba and West Africa.

Finally, Ferreira’s article, “An Afrocentric Approach to Musical Performance in the Black South Atlantic” is the only ethnomusicological study of *candombe* drumming available in English.⁸ Much of this work presents materials that Ferreira previously set forth in *Los tambores del candombe*. However, here he gives a greater emphasis on the symbolic interpretation of the rhythms and the physical gestures used to produce them. Although this source represents an excellent contribution to the literature, the English translation is often cumbersome.

⁶ Luis Ferreira, “La música afrouruguaya de tambores en la perspectiva cultural afro atlántica,” *Anuario: Antropología social y cultural en Uruguay*, ed. Sonia Romero Gorski (Montevideo: Nordan/FHCE, 2001); and “Conectando estructuras musicales con significados culturales: un estudio sobre sistemas de tamboreo en el Atlántico Negro,” *Anales del VI Congreso de la Rama Latinoamericana – Asociación Internacional para el Estudio de la Música Popular* (2005). <http://www.iaspmal.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/luisferreira.pdf> (accessed March 27, 2013).

⁷ James Koetting, “Analysis and Notation of West African Drum Ensemble Music,” *Selected Reports in Ethnomusicology*, vol. 1, no. 3 (1970): 116-146.

⁸ Luis Ferreira, “An Afrocentric Approach to Musical Performance in the Black South Atlantic: The Candombe Drumming in Uruguay,” *Transcultural Music Review* 11, article 12 (July 2007). http://www.sibetrans.com/trans/trans11/art12.htm#_edn1 (accessed March 21, 2013).

Gustavo Goldman offers his own extensive study of Afro-Uruguayan history and drumming in *Candombe, ¡Salve Baltasar!*⁹ In this investigation, Goldman limits his focus to Barrio Sur, a neighborhood in central Montevideo, and the significance of *candombe* in relation to the celebration of the Día de los Reyes (Day of Kings) that takes place on the sixth of January each year. His musical examples and descriptions of performance practices exclusively illustrate the rhythms and style associated with this one neighborhood.

The earliest comprehensive study of the drums was *El tamboril y la comparsa*, written in 1965 by the renowned Uruguayan musicologist Lauro Ayestarán and his wife, Flor de María Rodríguez de Ayestarán.¹⁰ This work is invaluable for providing some of the first transcriptions of the *llamada* rhythms, based on recordings that Lauro Ayestarán made outside of his home in Montevideo in 1958. His descriptions of the events and diagrams of the drums offer an excellent historical perspective into earlier traditions that have rapidly changed since his death in 1966. This work was released posthumously and was edited by the author's son, Alejandro Ayestarán, who contributed details about the changes that had occurred in the drums and their use in performance since the time of his father's investigation.

Lauro Ayestarán also devoted a section of his landmark publication, *El folklore musical uruguayo*, to the early history of *candombe* and Afro-Uruguayan music.¹¹ These sections of the book rely on excerpts from travelers' accounts and municipal documents

⁹ Gustavo Goldman, *Candombe: ¡Salve Baltasar! La fiesta de Reyes en el Barrio Sur de Montevideo* (Montevideo: Perro Andaluz, 2003).

¹⁰ Lauro Ayestarán, Alejandro Ayestarán, and Flor de María Rodríguez de Ayestarán, *El tamboril y la comparsa* (Montevideo: Arca, 1990).

¹¹ Lauro Ayestarán, *El folklore musical uruguayo* (Montevideo: Arca, 1972).

from Montevideo during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, providing valuable insights into the perception of the genre during its early history. However, unlike *El tamboril y la comparsa*, this work provides no explicit information on drumming patterns or styles.

In a review of several studies of *candombe*, Alejandro Frigerio critiques Ayestarán for his “excessive preoccupation with the reconstruction of the original forms ... of *candombe*.”¹² According to Frigerio, Ayestarán’s undue concern with authenticity depicts current Afro-Uruguayan culture as “a pale reflection ... a degeneration of the original,” representing all innovation as “a deformation.”¹³ Frigerio points to similar approaches by Paulo Carvalho Neto and Ruben Carámbula.¹⁴ He especially criticizes the latter, accurately stating that “Carámbula ... varies between offering an image of blacks as savage or as infantile beings.”¹⁵

Músicas populares del Uruguay by Coriún Aharonián is a collection of previous essays and articles examining Uruguayan popular music. Aharonián devotes two chapters to the music of the *tambores* and *candombe*, the latter of which he perceives as dependent on the drumming patterns of the genre.¹⁶ In both chapters, cultural analysis takes precedence over musical analysis and descriptions, as Aharonián often emphasizes

¹² “una preocupación excesiva por la reconstrucción de la formas originales ... de candombe.” Alejandro Frigerio, “Estudios sobre los afrouuguayos: una revisión crítica,” *Cultura negra en el Cono Sur: representaciones en conflicto* (Buenos Aires: EDUCA, 2000): 8.

¹³ “un pálido reflejo ... una degeneración del original y toda innovación constituirá ... una deformación.” Ibid., 9.

¹⁴ Paulo Carvalho Neto, “The Candombe: A Dramatic Dance from Afro-Uruguayan Folklore,” *Ethnomusicology* 6, no. 3 (Sept. 1962): 164-174; Ruben Carámbula, *El candombe* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Sol, 1995).

¹⁵ “oscila entre brindar una imagen del negro como salvaje, o como un ser infantil.” Ibid., 5.

¹⁶ Coriún Aharonián, *Músicas populares del Uruguay* (Montevideo: Universidad de la República, 2007).

the marginalization, and at times, deterioration of traditional musical and cultural elements through various forms of racial discrimination, appropriation, and more recently, globalization.

One of the most distinctive works to examine Afro-Uruguayan drum culture is *Memorias del tamboril* by Tomás Olivera Chirimini and Juan Antonio Varese.¹⁷ The majority of this work is presented as an allegorical exchange between Chirimini and a fictional character named Repique, “an old drum maker that transmits and represents the inherent wisdom of Africa transplanted to [Uruguay].”¹⁸ Following this dialogue, the author provides detailed descriptions of topics ranging from drum-making and ensemble organization to cultural analyses of issues related to race and identity.

Chirimini and Varese also collaborated on *Los candombes de reyes: las llamadas*. This study is similar in organization to the chapters about Afro-Uruguayan music in Ayestarán’s *El folklore musical uruguayo*, although with more detail in regard to descriptions of *llamada* events. In addition to his works with Chirimini, Varese authored a bilingual introduction to *candombe*, titled *Estampas de candombe (Candombe Vignettes)*. The book offers an excellent series of simple descriptions of musical, historical, and folkloric elements associated with *candombe*. Each of the vignettes is accompanied by artwork by the distinguished Uruguayan artist, Rubén Dario Galloza.

As noted earlier in the introduction, many studies of Afro-Uruguayan history include or emphasize *candombe* as a defining element, as was the case with the first

¹⁷ Tomás Olivera Chirimini and Juan Antonio Varese, *Memorias del tamboril* (Montevideo: Banda Oriental, 2012).

¹⁸ “un viejo fabricante de tamboriles que transmite y representa la sabiduría inmanente de África trasplantada a nuestro medio.” Ibid., jacket cover.

volume of *Historia afrouruguaya* by Oscar Montaña.¹⁹ This book is perhaps the most extensive investigation of early Afro-Uruguayan history to date, with detailed analyses of population statistics and documents detailing the conditions of living for slaves from Africa and their descendants in the eighteenth century. The final chapter explores the development of *candombe* during that period, as well as the significant role of its music and dance in “resisting the ravages of slavery.”²⁰

A unique offering is *Ayer y hoy: afrouruguayos y tradición oral*, in which Mónica Olaza presents and analyzes interview responses from ten men and ten women from the Afro-Montevidean community.²¹ A large number of these responses highlight not only the significance of the *tambor* and *candombe* to Afro-Uruguayans, but also the fears held by members of this minority community regarding the current evolution and transmission of these traditions. In an attempt to conceal the identities of those interviewed, Olaza provides only their first names or nicknames. However, in many instances, this information is enough to reveal the participant’s identities.²²

In stating the main theme of his article, “Llamadas de tambor y etnicidad,” Walter Díaz Marrero cites the Afro-Uruguayan artist Ruben Galloza, who, in 1985, said: “We [Afro-Uruguayans] do not confuse the *llamadas* with carnival.”²³ Specifically, Marrero

¹⁹ Oscar Montaña, *Historia afrouruguaya*, vol. 1 (Montevideo: Mastergraf, 2008).

²⁰ “resistiendo a todos los embates de la esclavitud.” Ibid., 459.

²¹ Mónica Olaza, *Ayer y hoy: afrouruguayos y tradición oral* (Montevideo: Trilce, 2009).

²² One clear example concerns the interviewee identified as *Lobo*. Fernando “Lobo” Nuñez is one of the most recognizable figures associated with the Montevidean neighborhood Barrio Sur, and many of the interview responses assigned to *Lobo* reflect this association.

²³ “No confundimos las llamadas con el Carnaval.” Marrero, Walter Díaz, “Llamadas de tambor y etnicidad: una máscara blanca sobre la memoria afrouruguaya,” *Antropología Social y Cultural en Uruguay: Anuario 2006*. ed. Sonia Romero Gorski (Montevideo: UNESCO, 2006): 99.

examines the *llamadas*, events he refers to as “Afro-cultural memory in action,” and their conversion to a product of commercial and touristic consumption.²⁴ To reinforce his arguments, Marrero closes the article with selections from an interview he conducted with Benjamín Arrascaeta, a well-known *candombe* drummer. These excerpts include Arrascaeta’s memories of learning to play the drums and his thoughts on the changing context of the *llamadas* and carnival.

Luis Orban examines the current significance of the Desfile de Las Llamadas in his article, “El mundo de Las Llamadas como representatción actual.”²⁵ He focuses on the diverse forms in which participants assign significance to the event, particularly in regard to religion, politics, and economics. A large part of the article contrasts the views of the two most influential Afro-Uruguayan social organizations: Mundo Afro and the Asociación Cultural y Social Uruguay Negro (ACSUN). Ultimately, Orban concludes that, regardless of the opposing significance of the carnival parade to the participants, “they are all indulged by the music of the drums.”²⁶

A few English language studies also deserve mention, the first of which was written by Abril Trigo, a Uruguayan who currently resides in the United States and who serves as Professor of Latin American Cultures at Ohio State University. In his article “Candombe and the Reterritorialization of Culture,” Trigo discusses the influence of Uruguayan carnival on *candombe* and the practice of the *llamadas*.²⁷ He points to the

²⁴ “memoria afrocultural en acción.” Ibid., 102.

²⁵ Luis Orban, “El mundo de Las Llamadas como representación actual,” *Antropología Social y Cultural en Uruguay: Anuario 2006*, ed. Sonia Romero Gorski (Montevideo: UNESCO, 2006).

²⁶ Ibid., 116.

²⁷ Abril Trigo, “Candombe and the Reterritorialization of Culture,” *Callaloo* 16, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 716-28.

period of the military dictatorship as the moment *candombe* moved from the “peripheral” to the national stage as a “symbol of resistance to neofascism.”²⁸ Additionally, Trigo examines the impact of this shift on Uruguayan popular musicians, which led to the fusion of *candombe* with other musical styles.

In *Afro-Uruguayan Literature*—specifically the chapter titled “Afro-Uruguayan Drum Culture: ‘Comparsa,’ ‘Carnaval,’ ‘Candombe’”—Marvin Lewis examines the symbolic treatment of the *tambor*, *candombe*, and carnival through literary examples by Afro-Uruguayan authors.²⁹ Lewis, a Professor Emeritus of Spanish at the University of Missouri, argues that not enough attention has been paid to these authors in Afro-Uruguayan studies. However, his analysis demonstrates the difficulty that outsiders have in distinguishing the meaning of the term *llamadas*. Throughout his book, Lewis always links the *llamadas* to carnival. When he states that “the [Desfile de Las] Llamadas, or the calling of the African ancestors, is a central event in carnival and the single most important Afro-Uruguayan cultural event,” his analysis contradicts the viewpoints of many in the community he is representing.³⁰

In addition to the studies by Andrews and Lewis, two other English language studies by North American scholars facilitated my understanding of *candombe* identities and their associations with geographical zones in central Montevideo. In the article “Reshaping the Urban Core,” Lauren Benton presents an outstanding investigation detailing the housing crisis that took place in central Montevideo during the military

²⁸ Ibid., 716.

²⁹ Marvin A. Lewis, *Afro-Uruguayan Literature: Post-Colonial Perspectives* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2003). As with Andrews, a Spanish translation was released in 2012: *La literatura afrouguaya: perspectivas post-coloniales* (Montevideo: Casa de Cultura Afrouguaya, 2012).

³⁰ Ibid., 16.

dictatorship (1973-1985).³¹ Benton also highlights the impact of the destruction of Afro-Uruguayan cultural spaces on modern *candombe* cultural identities, although this is not the main focus of her article.

Vannina Sztainbok further explores associations between place and cultural identity in her doctoral thesis, “Imagining the Afro-Uruguayan *Conventillo*: Belonging and the Fetish of Place and Blackness.”³² Sztainbok focuses on the *conventillos* (low-income tenement houses) in the central Montevidean neighborhoods of Barrio Sur and Palermo. In addressing “the paradox of how a community can be materially marginalized, yet symbolically celebrated,” her thesis has proven beneficial in defining the significance of musical and cultural associations between the rhythms of the *tambores* and these two neighborhoods.³³

Aside from historical and cultural studies, a small number of pedagogical materials devoted to the study of the *tambores* and the *llamada* rhythms exist. The most recent and technically comprehensive is a two volume, self-published DVD instructional method by the Uruguayan percussionist Daniel “Tatita” Márquez, titled *Método del candombe*.³⁴ Both volumes are in Spanish, although the first includes an option for English subtitles. The first volume provides exercises for the development of technique; an introduction to the basic rhythms of the *chico*, *piano*, and *repique*; and examples of rhythmic variations associated with Montevidean identities. The second volume also

³¹ Lauren A. Benton, “Reshaping the Urban Core: The Politics of Housing in Authoritarian Uruguay,” from the *Latin American Research Review* 21, no. 2 (1986).

³² Vannina Sztainbok, “Imagining the Afro-Uruguayan *Conventillo*: Belonging and the Fetish of Place and Blackness,” (Doctoral thesis, University of Toronto, 2009).

³³ Ibid., ii.

³⁴ Daniel “Tatita” Márquez, *Metódo del candombe*, 2 vols. (Montevideo: Tatita Music, 2011).

begins with technical exercises before elaborating further on call and response patterns for each of the three drums, particularly the *piano* and *repique*.

Wellington Suárez, a drummer from Barrio Sur, gives an excellent presentation of the drums and basic *candombe* rhythms on *Afro-Uruguayan Rhythms: Candombe*, a CD/DVD set from Surmenage Productions.³⁵ Like Volume 1 of *Método del candombe*, this DVD provides English subtitles. However, Suárez only discusses basic rhythmic and technical principles. Following these demonstrations, he provides an ensemble performance that illustrates how the individual drums interact. The CD also provides audio examples of the individual drums, as well as performances of various neighborhood styles. For untrained listeners, distinguishing between these variations may be difficult.

In 2002, Mel Bay published a bilingual instructional method titled, *El toque de candombe*.³⁶ This book (which includes a CD) features transcriptions of *tambor* rhythms and details their use on congas, drum-set, and bass guitar. For musicians trained in reading Western notation, this is an excellent source for learning these rhythms and their application to Uruguayan popular music. Machado does define the historic neighborhood styles and include recorded demonstrations; however the transcribed examples of *candombe* rhythms do not identify these associations.

A similar and more recent method is *Coordinación rítmica: candombe y murga* by Miguel Romano.³⁷ Like *El toque de candombe*, the basic rhythms of the *tambores* are

³⁵ *Afro-Uruguayan Rhythms: Candombe* (Surmenages B000GL196C, 2006). DVD directed by Alex Alava.

³⁶ Hugo “Foca” Machado, Willy Muñoz, and Jorge Sadi, *El toque de Candombe* (Pacific: Mel Bay, 2002). This method is out-of-print and no longer available for purchase.

³⁷ Miguel Romano, *Coordinación rítmica: candombe y murga* (Montevideo, 2010).

presented in both Spanish and English. This method places greater emphasis on applying *candombe* rhythms to the drum-set. In addition to *candombe*, Romano presents the rhythms associated with drumming styles of *murga*, another musical style closely associated with carnival in Montevideo.³⁸

Luis Jure, a Uruguayan composer with experience playing in Montevidean *cuerdas*, authored two works in 1992 that gave particular emphasis to the role of the *repique* in *llamada* performances. *Los cortes del candombe*, co-authored with the Mexican ethnomusicologist Olga Picún, examines the function of the *cortes*, which, in this study, refer to rhythmic “calls” or “breaks” performed by *repique* players that provide direction to ensemble members.³⁹ Particularly useful are the transcriptions provided by the authors, as well as background information regarding locations and parade routes in which the *llamadas* are performed. In *¡Perico, suba ahí!*, Jure continues his examination of the *repique*, through an analysis of the motivic development processes demonstrated in an improvisational performance by the well-known *candombe* drummer Pedro “Perico” Gularte.⁴⁰

In addition to providing an introduction to *candombe* drumming, in this paper I examine the profound role the *tambores* and their rhythms play in defining Uruguayan identities. Although scholars have addressed these topics in previous studies, this paper is

³⁸ *Murgas* are traditionally characterized as large male choruses dressed in elaborate costumes, and accompanied by small drum ensembles consisting of a snare drum, bass drum, and cymbals.

³⁹ Luis Jure and Olga Picún, *Los cortes de los tambores: aspectos musicales y funcionales de las paradas en las llamadas de tambores afro-montevideanos* (Montevideo: Universidad de la República, 1992), <http://www.eumus.edu.uy/docentes/jure/cortes/cortes.html> (accessed January 4, 2012).

⁴⁰ Luis Jure, *¡Perico, suba ahí!: pautación y análisis de un solo de repique de Pedro “Perico” Gularte* (Montevideo: Universidad de la República, 1992), <http://www.eumus.edu.uy/docentes/jure/perico/perico.pdf> (Accessed January 4, 2012).

the first to analyze the link between *candombe* rhythms and their assigned identities in English.

Additionally, a majority of the literature reviewed examines the link between music and identity from a cultural perspective; in the studies and methods that emphasize the music, cultural analysis is absent. Simon Frith writes that “the academic study of popular music has been limited by the assumption that the sounds must somehow 'reflect' or 'represent' the people.”⁴¹ As a percussionist interested in both the musical and cultural significance of *candombe* drumming, my intent with this paper has been “to trace the connections back, from the [*toques* of the *tambores*] ... to the social groups who produce and consume [them].”⁴²

Methodology

This investigation is modeled on similar studies of African and African-based musics in the Americas by Paul Berliner, Lois Wilcken, Paul Austerlitz, and John Chernoff, among other scholars. In particular, the research goals of this essay parallel the objectives of Chernoff in his book, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility*.⁴³ I have adapted these goals to reflect an emphasis on *candombe* drumming and the practice of the *llamadas* as follows:

1. Provide a step-by-step introduction to *candombe* drumming and its application to musical events known as *llamadas*.
2. Show how *candombe* drumming and the *llamadas* reflect Uruguayan history and culture.

⁴¹ Simon Frith, “Music and Identity,” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay (London: Sage Publications, 2006): 108.

⁴² Ibid., 108.

⁴³ John Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981): 4.

3. Use *candombe* drumming and the *llamadas* as a basis for defining Uruguayan identities.

To carry out these objectives, I began by examining previous studies about *candombe* and Afro-Uruguayan history in combination with the analysis of audio and video recordings that demonstrate the musical manifestations of *candombe*. In particular, I relied on studies by George Reid Andrews and Luis Ferreira to construct a holistic account of Uruguay's complicated racial history in which the *tambores* and the *llamadas* are the central focus.

From August 2011-April 2012, supported by a Fulbright Fellowship, I carried out fieldwork in Montevideo, Uruguay. There, I employed the technique of participant-observation to gain a personal understanding of *candombe* rhythms and their application in *llamada* performances. My understanding of drumming identities was developed by observing five different ensembles and analyzing their interpretation of *candombe* rhythms. Each of these groups performed variations of three different *toques* that Uruguayans consider to hold historic and cultural significance. The groups I regularly observed were C-1080 (Cuareim style); Sinfonía de Ansina, Elumbé, and La Melaza (Ansina style); and Zumbaé (Gaboto style).⁴⁴ Through these observations, I was able to focus on how individual drummers executed and interpreted the specific rhythmic patterns for each of the three drums. Conversely, I attended seven organized *llamada* events, which allowed me to compare from a fixed location the various interpretations of ensemble *toques* by a large number of groups. At these events, I concentrated on the collective sound of these rhythms as opposed to individual performance.

⁴⁴ The significance of these styles is explored further in Chapters 2, 4, and 5.

As a performer, twice a week I attended the meetings of the Taller de Percusión (Percussion Workshop) at the athletic club Huracán Buceo in the Malvín neighborhood. Guillermo Ceballos, the leader of the group, placed me on the *piano* drum, and I applied the concepts I elsewhere observed as part of a *candombe* ensemble. This experience included participating in the qualifying parade for the Desfile de Las Llamadas, as well as two smaller carnival events that took place in neighborhoods outside the city center.

Another major influence on both my musical and cultural understanding of *candombe* came through regular meetings with Álvaro Salas, the Director of the School of Candombe with the Afro-Uruguayan social organization Mundo Afro. Since Mundo Afro often employs the *tambores* and *candombe* to engage the Uruguayan community regarding issues of racial discrimination, Álvaro was very receptive to my desire to explore Afro-Uruguayan history and culture from a musical perspective. Much of the musical and cultural analysis presented in this paper is based on our formal and informal conversations and musical exchanges.

To achieve the goals of both musical and cultural analysis, this paper is divided into five chapters. After providing a basic overview of *candombe* and surveying the literature in Chapter 1, I synthesize various Uruguayan historical perspectives, particularly those of Andrews and Ferreira, in Chapter 2. Through this synthesis, I am able to present a holistic history of the social, political, and cultural processes that influenced the development of the *llamadas* as they exist today. Chapter 3 closely examines the *tambores* and their context in *llamada* performances. In Chapter 4, I present the basic *candombe* rhythms and discuss the processes involved in learning to play the drums. In Chapter 5, I investigate the cultural significance of the *llamada* rhythms,

particularly their associations with three neighborhoods in central Montevideo. The purpose of this final chapter is to contextualize the relationship between the musical and social identities of the *toques madres*. These identities are defined through three methods of analysis, the first two of which are musical and the third of which is cultural. The first explores variations in rhythm, with special attention to the drum patterns played on the *piano*; the second applies additional elements of musical style (e.g., dynamics, tempo, phrasing) to differentiate the three *toques*. The third considers aspects of identity that define the *toques* and addresses cultural meaning beyond the limits of central Montevideo.

As a whole, this essay aims to complement and expand upon existing scholarship. In order to accomplish these objectives, my examination of the rhythms and their association with Montevidean identities draws on my relationship to *candombe* as a percussionist and as a non-Uruguayan. By advancing my outsider's perspective that embraces and questions previous studies (particularly those by Uruguayan scholars), I intend to stimulate discourse regarding the musical and cultural nature of *candombe* beyond the boundaries of Uruguay. Furthermore, I propose to aid musicians and scholars by positioning *candombe* within the broader field of African-based music throughout Latin America.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

Situated between Brazil and Argentina, Uruguay is the second smallest country in South America, with an estimated population of 3.3 million people. Close to half of the population is located in the capital city of Montevideo, situated at the mouth of the Rio de la Plata (Figure 3.1). Location is an important factor to consider when discussing *candombe* as a symbol of Uruguayan nationalism, since Montevideo has been the site of the most significant social and musical negotiations in the development of the cultural form.



Figure 2.1: Map of Uruguay⁴⁵

⁴⁵ “Uruguay Political Map,” from the maps.com website: http://www.maps.com/ref_map.aspx?cid=694%2c695%2c697%2c717&pid=12433 (accessed March 26, 2013).

Montevideo was founded in 1724 by the Spaniards to defend against Portuguese interests along the Rio de la Plata. Due to its location, the city was a major South American port and a center of commercial activity during the period that included the transatlantic slave trade. Records indicate the first Africans arrived in Montevideo as early as 1742 in the form of slave labor.⁴⁶

Many histories of the country have failed to acknowledge the significance of slavery, as demonstrated in *Uruguay: A Country Study*, published in 1992 by the United States Library of Congress, which features the following statement: “Thousands of slaves were brought into Uruguay between the mid-eighteenth and the early nineteenth-century, but the number was relatively low because the major economic activity—livestock raising—was not labor intensive and because labor requirements were met by increasing immigration from Europe.”⁴⁷ In a later section of the same study, Charles Guy Gillespie virtually erases the possibility of an African-descended population in Uruguay with the statement: “Although vestiges of African culture survived in the annual carnival celebrations known as the [Desfile de Las] Llamadas, Uruguay's black population was relatively assimilated in 1990.”⁴⁸

In contrast, George Reid Andrews points to the Uruguayan census of 1805, which “counted ninety-four hundred people living in the city, of whom over one-third (thirty-three hundred) were African or Afro-Uruguayan. Almost all of them were slaves (86

⁴⁶ Montaña, 115.

⁴⁷ Raúl Jacob and Martin Weinstein, “Historical Setting,” in *Uruguay: A Country Study*, ed. Rex Hudson and Sandra Meditz (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1992), 8.

⁴⁸ Charles Guy Gillespie, “The Society and its Environment,” in *Uruguay: A Country Study*, 65.

percent), a rate of enslavement higher than in other Latin American cities at that time.”⁴⁹

Regarding labor demands, Andrews notes:

Slave laborers ... built the colonial city's fortifications, houses, and commercial buildings. Slaves also worked as domestic servants, as street vendors, as porters, and as skilled artisans. ... They worked on farms and ranches, many as gaucho cowboys, and in the *saladeros* where beef was dried and salted for export to Brazil and the Caribbean.⁵⁰

Today, Afro-Uruguayans remain a large minority, with 2006 census figures showing that they represent around 9 percent of the total population.⁵¹ Two factors are generally cited as causes for the significant reduction in the population of Afro-Uruguayan descendants: war and immigration. One of the means through which slaves gained their freedom during the first-half of the nineteenth-century was through military service, particularly during the Guerra Grande civil war (1839-1851). The need for soldiers by the two warring political parties ultimately resulted in the final abolition of slavery in 1846; however, for African and Afro-Uruguayan males, this freedom came in the form of forced conscription, resulting in the death of thousands. The second factor was the arrival of a large number of European immigrants beginning in the 1860s, who took up residence in lower income areas—spaces that, until then, were occupied by the Afro-Montevidean population; over time, racial integration resulted in miscegenation, reducing the overall percentage of the Afro-Uruguayan population.

⁴⁹ Andrews, 23. Regarding census data, Andrews cites Oscar Montaña, *Umkhonto* (Montevideo: Rosebud, 1997):120. In a successive endnote (p. 181), Andrews supports his argument by providing data regarding the African and African-descended populations in Brazil and Buenos Aires.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁵¹ “Encuesta nacional de hogares ampliada 2006,” Instituto Nacional de Estadística Uruguay (2006), <http://www.ine.gub.uy/enha2006/flash/Flash%20Ascendencia.pdf> (accessed March 26, 2013).

From “Nations” to “Societies”

Africans arriving to Montevideo during the eighteenth century were grouped by ethnic origin, giving rise to associations called *naciones* (nations). In addition to offering mutual aid and defending the rights of their members, *naciones* provided a means for displaced Africans to conserve and practice many of their cultural traditions, which included music and dance. It is in this regard that the term *candombe* first came into use, referring to “the occasions when Africans performed their national dances, and recreated, spiritually and symbolically, their societies of origin.”⁵² Oscar Montaña states that, for those early Africans, “*candombe* was fundamental in resisting the ravages of slavery ... it was a form of reaction and rebellion against the restraints and enslavement to which they were subjected.”⁵³ Luis Ferreira calls attention to the custom of “marching in procession, playing their instruments and dancing in various festivals and on established days, especially the Day of Kings and in carnival.”⁵⁴ This practice of the *naciones* exerted a significant influence on the *llamada* performances that continue in present-day Montevideo.

Throughout the nineteenth-century, several factors contributed to the absorption of cultural features that defined the identity of the *naciones*, leading to the eventual

⁵² “Candombe designaba entonces las ocasiones en que los africanos ejecutaban sus danzas nacionales y recreaban, espiritual y simbólicamente, sus sociedades de origen.” Ferreira, *Los tambores del candombe*, 22-23.

⁵³ “el Candombe fue fundamental, resistiendo a todos los embates de la esclavitud ...era una forma de reacción y rebeldía a las imposiciones y al avasallamiento de que eran objeto.” Montaña, 459-460.

⁵⁴ “marchar en procesión, tocando sus instrumentos y bailando en varios festivales y días consagrados, especialmente el día de Reyes y en el carnaval.” Luis Ferreira, “La música afrouruguaya de tambores en la perspectiva cultural afro-atlántica,” in *Anuario: Antropología social y cultural en Uruguay*, ed. Sonia Romero Gorski (Montevideo: Nordan/FHCE, 2001), 43.

dissolution of these features in the decades following the final abolition of slavery in

1846. Luis Ferreira states:

In the beginning, the ceremonies tried to reproduce for the Africans the differences between groups of distinct societies of origin. With the passing of time, an interculturalization of the elements of diverse *naciones* was produced, by among other factors, the condition of urban proximity ... and a lineage that was not determined exclusively by the ethnic group of origin. In this way, the unique characteristics and selective retentions of African characteristics were defined through a historical process of the society, the politics of the dominant class, and the mestizaje that would become common features later defined as Afro-Uruguayan."⁵⁵

The second half of the nineteenth-century was one of great significance and rapid change for Afro-Uruguayan and *candombe* culture. In the years following the Guerra Grande, *candombe* became a popular form of entertainment for white Montevideans, although their attendance at these events often included “ridiculing the disparity between ... the African [*naciones*] dignity and solemnity, and ... their material poverty and social dishonor.”⁵⁶

It was also during this period that Montevideo gave rise to a large number of social clubs and mutual aid societies based on European models. Andrews notes that “Afro-Uruguayans were very much a part of this movement, though a racially segregated part.”⁵⁷ By 1870, the *naciones* had regrouped into similar associations, called *sociedades de negros* (black societies), and synonymous carnival groups called *comparsas*. As Afro-

⁵⁵ “En un comienzo las ceremonias tratarían de reproducir a las africanas con las diferencias propias entre grupos de distintas sociedades de origen. Con el correr del tiempo, se produciría una interculturalización de los elementos de las diversas Naciones; entre otros factores, por las propias condiciones de cercanía urbana...y por una descendencia que ya no estaría determinada exclusivamente por el grupo étnico de origen. Se fueron definiendo así características propias y retenciones selectivas de las características africanas que, con el proceso histórico de la sociedad, las políticas de la clase dominante y la mestización, devendrían en rasgos comunes posteriormente definibles como afrouruguayos.” Ferreira, *Los tambores del candombe*, 28.

⁵⁶ Andrews, 27.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

Uruguayans made this transition, they continued to cultivate cultural aspects associated with the *naciones*. However, the characteristics that at one time had represented African ethnicity came to signify Afro-Uruguayan families or neighborhood affiliations; this included the *toques* performed by *candombe* drumming ensembles. Luis Ferreira also refers to an additional group of “nuances—most noticeably colors of flags and emblems, paintings on the drums, and costume colors—which allow us to establish a simple linear relation between an ancient *nación* and a current *comparsa* or neighborhood.”⁵⁸

At the same time that the emerging *sociedades de negros* were developing their organizations using European models, *candombe* was appropriated by upper and middle-class non Afro-Uruguayans as carnival entertainment. In 1876, a group of white Montevideans appeared in blackface and performed in carnival under the name, “Negros Lubolos.” By the early 1900s, *lubolo* designated the concept of “whites becoming blacks in carnival.”

Prior to this, however, the term was linked to African ethnicity and a *nación* located in the north Cordón neighborhood of Montevideo (Figure 3.2). Today, the term continues to exist as a generic label for all *sociedades de negros*. While the success of the Negros Lubolos in 1876 is often cited as the reason for the change in meaning, Ferreira calls the appropriation of the name a “consequence of racism,” since the *sociedades de negros* “were in no position to confront the situation.”⁵⁹ Continuing, he offers an alternative interpretation, stating that the acceptance of this reality by the *sociedades de*

⁵⁸ “matices que diferenciaran entre sí a los nuevos grupos —los colores de las banderas y de los emblemas, los dibujos pintados en los tambores y los colores del vestuario de los tamborileros entre los rasgos más notorios—sin que por esto podamos establecer linealmente una relación simple entre una antigua Nación y una actual comparsa o barrio.” Ferreira, *Los tambores del candombe*, 30.

⁵⁹ “esto proceso es consecuencia del racismo ... es probable que las sociedades de negros no estuvieron en condiciones de confrontar esta situación.” Ibid., 33.

negros "was an intelligent strategy developed to win alternative spaces and social acceptance."⁶⁰

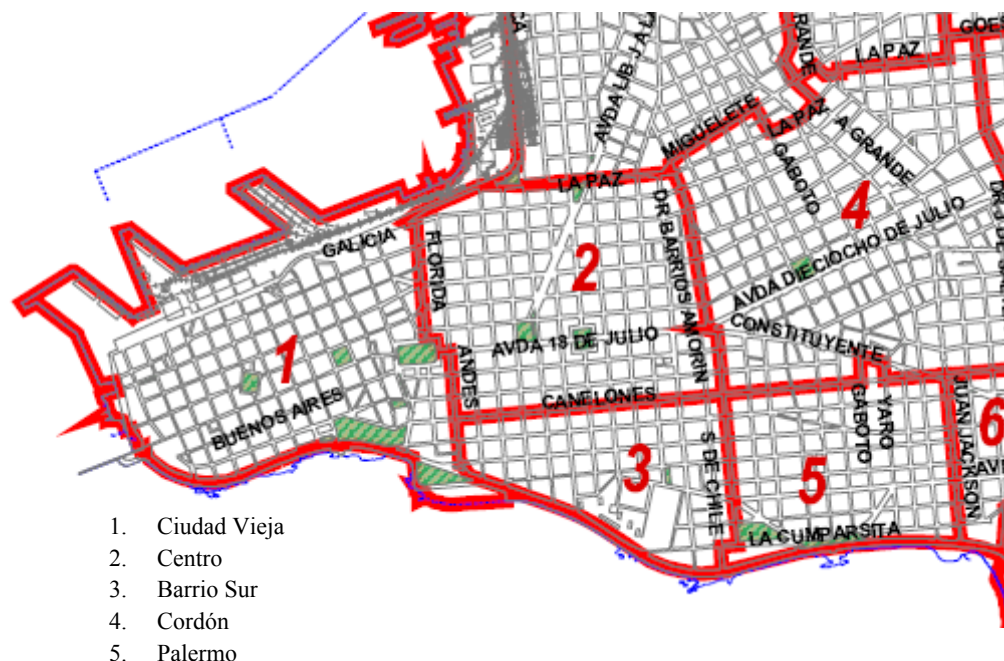


Figure 2.2: Map of Central Montevideo⁶¹

Another alternative for the expansive use of the term *luján* stems from the increasing immigrant population that began to arrive in the 1860s. The demand to house this newly displaced population led to the construction of *conventillos* (low-income collective housing) in the neighborhoods of Barrio Sur, Palermo, and north Cordón (Figure 3.2). Already living in these areas were Afro-Uruguayans, a sector of the population also in need of affordable housing. By 1900, the *conventillos* arose as the centers of racial integration in Montevideo. This condition was reflected in the name

⁶⁰ “una inteligente estrategia que las sociedades de negros desarrollaron para ganar espacios alternativos y aceptación social.” Ferreira, *Los tambores del candombe*, 33.

⁶¹ “Extracted from “Approximate Neighborhood Area” map provided by the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (September 2006), http://www.ine.gub.uy/mapas/01%20Departamental/a0h_barrios.pdf (accessed March 28, 2013).

Medio Mundo, a *conventillo* located on the street Cuareim in the neighborhood Barrio Sur, which derived its name from housing “half the world” (Figure 2.2).⁶²



Figure 2.3: Medio Mundo, 1954⁶³

Social desegregation in this form led to cultural integration, and *candombe* emerged as a central element in *conventillo* life. In this setting, *candombe* helped to establish community identity, although not along ethnic or racial lines, but through neighborhood associations. One way that European immigrants established themselves as a part of these emerging communities was through their participation in the music and

⁶² Vannina Sztainbok, “Imagining the Afro-Uruguayan *Conventillo*: Belonging and the Fetish of Place and Blackness” (Doctoral thesis, University of Toronto, 2009), 58. The actual name of Medio Mundo was the Conventillo Risso.

⁶³ Photo by Ferruccio Musitelli. Available online through the Centro de Fotografía Montevideo, <http://cdf.montevideo.gub.uy/exposicion/ferruccio-musitelli-muestra-homenaje#> (accessed April 21, 2013).

dance of the Afro-Uruguayan *comparsas*, and they came to form part of a new group of *negros lubolos*. As part of this process of racial integration, the *sociedades de negros* would become *sociedades de negros y lubolos*—a designation that today is often shortened to simply *lubolos*.

Musically, many changes also formed part of this process, as Andrews points out:

Candombe drumming, which as recently as the 1850s and 1860s had been the exclusive patrimony of the city's Africans, had now spread through the city's working-class neighborhoods and been embraced by Euro-Uruguayans, Afro-Uruguayans, and European immigrants alike. In these neighborhoods it continued to play much the same role that it had in the African nations, as a potent vehicle of community-building and of social bonding.⁶⁴

As *candombe* transitioned into the twentieth-century, the *tambor* emerged as the defining musical and cultural symbol associated with this cultural form.

La llamada

As defined in the introduction, a *llamada* is most visible in present-day Uruguay as a collective drumming performance, generally in the form of a parade. Performers and scholars make a distinction between two types of these events: “some are neighborhood *llamadas*, more or less spontaneous and informal, and the others are official, basically organized by state institutions.”⁶⁵

On both the national and international stage, the most important of these events is the official Desfile de Las Llamadas (Parade of the Drum Calls), which takes place in late January or early February during Uruguayan carnival. Often, however, this competition is heavily criticized for its excessive commercialization, leading to a loss of fundamental

⁶⁴ Andrews, 71.

⁶⁵ “unas son las llamadas de los barrios, de carácter más o menos espontáneo e informal, y las otras son las oficiales, organizadas básicamente desde instituciones estatales.” Olaza, 48.

elements representing the Afro-Uruguayan heritage. This section examines the processes that led to the division in the interpretation of *llamada* performances and provides an overview of the context within which these interpretations currently exist.



Figure 2.4: Early twentieth century *comparsa*⁶⁶

Little is known about the practice of the *llamadas* prior to the 1900s, except that the drums were traditionally only performed in public during carnival and in rehearsals in the weeks leading up to the event.⁶⁷ Luis Ferreira mentions that the official carnival parade can be traced back to competitive events dating from 1905.⁶⁸ Furthermore, Gustavo Goldman points to the late 1920s and early 1930s as the moment “*llamadas* of *tambores*” became more visible outside the carnival cycle, specifically referring to *seis de*

⁶⁶ Taken from the Portal Candombe website, under “Historía: Las antiguas llamadas,” http://www.candombe.com.uy/historia_seccion6.html (accessed March 31, 2013).

⁶⁷ Goldman, 122.

⁶⁸ Ferreira, *Los tambores del candombe*, 60.

enero (January 6), which was the Epiphany or the Día de los Reyes (Day of Kings).⁶⁹

Historically, this was when the *naciones* celebrated the Coronation of the Congo kings.

Over time, however, these ceremonies merged with practices of the Catholic Church and became a celebration of the Black saints Balthazar and Benito.⁷⁰

As the visibility of the *llamadas* increased, so did their marketability. During the 1940s, government involvement in the regulation of carnival increased, with more emphasis on spectacle and competition than cultural or historical authenticity. In 1955, seeking to gain some control over the public presentation of the Afro-Uruguayan heritage, the Cultural and Social Association of Uruguay (ACSU) proposed the Fiestas Negras, a celebration that would include a parade of the *sociedades de negros y lubolos* on the sixth of January. The Montevidean government agreed, but, in 1956, moved the date of the parade to coincide with carnival, calling it the Desfile de Las Llamadas (often shortened to Las Llamadas). This title did not come with the approval of the ACSU, which cited the name as a misrepresentation of the practice of the *llamada*, a term intimately linked to the tradition of spontaneous, collective drum performance.⁷¹ As Aharonián states: “The official Desfile de las Llamadas takes that semi-ritual tradition out of context, and, from 1956, transforms it into an object of consumption.”⁷²

⁶⁹ Goldman, 122.

⁷⁰ Ferreira, *Los tambores del candombe*, 24-25; Goldman, 126.

⁷¹ Andrews, 111; Ferreira, *Los tambores del candombe*, 60. Ferreira cites an interview he conducted with Afro-Uruguayan artist Ruben Gallozo (1926-2002) in reference to the response by the ACSU over the name.

⁷² “El desfile oficial de llamadas saca de contexto esa tradición semi-ritual, y la transforma desde 1956 en un objeto de consumo.” Aharonián, 23.

Six groups participated in the first carnival Llamadas, with two groups sharing the first prize: Fantasía Negra from the Palermo neighborhood and Morenada from Barrio Sur. Both groups represented the *conventillo* culture of central Montevideo. The members of Fantasía Negra were residents of the Reus al Sur housing projects located on the Calle Ansina; those of Morenada hailed from Medio Mundo on Cuareim. Over time, these two street names—in addition to Gaboto in north Cordón—came to identify the *toques madres* (mother rhythms), from which all modern variations of *llamada* rhythms are believed to have been derived. By the mid-1980s, as a consequence of the military dictatorship, the *llamadas* of Cuareim, Ansina, and Gaboto assumed even greater meaning as symbols of Afro-Uruguayan memory and as voices of resistance against government oppression.

Displacement is a central theme in the history of *candombe*, and, for Africans and their descendants, the processes were never voluntary. From 1973 to 1985, Uruguay was ruled by an oppressive military dictatorship. During this period, Andrews notes:

Candombe became closely associated in the public mind with opposition to the dictatorship, an association that was further strengthened when the government demolished several of the historic *conventillos* and housing projects that had produced the most “traditional” and best-known *comparsas*.⁷³

On November 28, 1978, the Montevidean government authorized the eviction of tenants from any building declared to be in a state of disrepair. On December 5 of that same year, the residents of Medio Mundo were forced to evacuate; only a month later, the residents of the Ansina projects were also removed. Lauren Benton provides the following information in her analysis of the housing crisis in central Montevideo:

⁷³ Andrews, 124.

More than five hundred persons from Ansina and Medio Mundo ended up needing resettlement. ... Long residence in the neighborhood, 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. One woman from Ansina expressed a typical view when she stated that the eviction was carried out "because of the zone, because it's so close to the center and close to the river. They didn't care about our traditions. Tearing down the buildings was tearing down tradition—the tradition of Ansina and [Medio Mundo].”⁷⁴

These evictions were not restricted to the period of the dictatorship, but also included such events as the 1965 eviction of the residents of the Gaboto *conventillo* in order to house a police headquarters.

These events led to what Ferreira called “an internal Diaspora of the Afro-Montevidean population.”⁷⁵ This designation calls to mind an apparent paradox since evidence shows that these *conventillos* and the neighborhoods of which they formed a part housed a multi-racial population. Yet, although thoroughly integrated, these areas were defined by Afro-Uruguayan culture, and had for over a century served as the original meeting places of the African *naciones*. Goldman summarizes the expansive meaning of Afro-Uruguayan under these conditions, stating: “the presence of ‘blackness’ ... continued being felt as a characteristic that had been maintained and had transcended the boundaries of skin color.”⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Benton, 45-46.

⁷⁵ “una diáspora interna de la población afromontevideana.” Ferreira, *Los tambores del candombe*, 62.

⁷⁶ “la presencia de lo ‘negro’ ... sigue siendo una característica que se ha mantenido y ha traspasado la frontera del color de piel.” Goldman, 16.

Andrews commented on the role *candombe* played in defying the military dictatorship when he stated:

During the years in which the dictatorship silenced most of Uruguayan civil society, the thundering drums of *candombe* were the antithesis of that public silence ... the concept of the *llamada*, of calling people into the street to drum, dance, and become a part of a public celebration, was a direct denial of the authoritarian project."⁷⁷

One of the most moving examples of drumming as a form of resistance occurred on December 3, 1978, which marks the final occasion on which the *tambores* sounded in the Medio Mundo *conventillo*. Today this date is memorialized through observances of the National Day of Candombe, Afro-Uruguayan Culture, and Racial Equality.

Additionally, as a consequence of the dispersion of residents of Barrio Sur and Palermo, more and more *candombe* groups began to appear in neighborhoods outside of the city center. The widespread presence of the *tambores* remains a vibrant part of life in present-day Montevideo and is most evident in the various *llamada* parades and drumming rehearsals that take place throughout the year, especially in the Desfile de Las Llamadas.

On February 9-10, 2012, forty-two *comparsas* paraded in the carnival event (21 each night), with each group averaging 40-70 drummers. Since 2003, the official carnival parade has become so competitive that groups must qualify to participate. The top 15 ensembles that place in the official parade are automatically allowed to enter the competition the following year. Those not making the cut must take part in a qualifying parade, called the *prueba de admisión* (test of admission), which is held in late October or early November of the preceding year. In 2011, 30 groups took part in this event, with the top 19 moving on to compete in the grand carnival parade.

⁷⁷ Andrews, 123.

Although the official Desfile de Las Llamadas rules the national stage, for Afro-Uruguayans, January 6, the Día de los Reyes, continues to hold special significance. In recent years, however, this celebration has been criticized for losing its traditions. More than thirty *comparsas* participated in the *llamada* parade for Saint Balthazar in 2012. Although much of the pageantry associated with carnival was missing, there was a feeling that some of the groups saw this as an opportunity to practice for the official *desfile* in February. This aspect was particularly noticeable in regard to the timing and performance of *cortes*, which are the moments when the *tambores* break, or “cut” from the traditional *candombe* rhythms and often feature foreign musical styles.

The incorporation and increasing popularity of the *cortes* is of particular concern to many *candombe* traditionalists. Fernando “Lobo” Nuñez, a recognized drummer and drum-maker from Barrio Sur, states:

[The *llamadas*] no longer have anything to see, they all incorporate those *cortes*, with rhythms that are not from [Uruguay]. They are creating and presenting them in events with that form of playing, and, for me that is very bad. Now, practically no traditional, authentic groups remain. ... What I play, that takes the name *llamada*, takes a *cuerda* of *tambores* (group of drums). I am able to call someone with the drums, and, from over there they know it is me. They know they are playing in Barrio Sur: that is a *llamada*. The [Desfile de Las Llamadas] is what they do in the municipality and all that mess they do in carnival.⁷⁸

On the other hand, many musicians see these modifications as positive and as a part of a natural evolution of the form. When I asked Victoria “Pico” Riñón, a member of a younger generation of *candombe* performers, about the *cortes* while watching the

⁷⁸ “Ya no tienen nada que ver, todas incorporaron esos cortes, con ritmos que no son de acá, los que se están manifestando y presentando en eventos con esa modalidad de tocar que para mí está mal. Entonces ya grupos tradicionales auténticos prácticamente que no quedan. ... Y lo que yo toco, lo que nosotros tocamos de nombre lleva llamadas, lleva una cuerda de tambores. Y puedo estar llamando a alguien en ese momento o los que me escuchan allá saben que soy yo. Saben que están tocando en el barrio Sur, eso es llamada. Lo otro que hace el Municipio y todo ese mamarracho que hacen en carnaval.” Olaza, 53-54.

parade on January 6, 2012, she responded: “I think it’s good, you know, as long as there’s also respect for the roots.”

Respect for the *tambores* and the *toques* are a key concern for many when speaking on the current popularity and evolution of *candombe*. As the music and culture continue to extend beyond the boundaries of Montevideo, many Uruguayans fear that they will lose one of their greatest national treasures. In 2009, this concern contributed to the decision by UNESCO to assist in the safeguarding of *candombe* through its inscription on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Many Afro-Uruguayan *candombe* musicians embrace this recognition. They are working to develop programs to educate the Uruguayan public about not only the history and socio-cultural significance of *candombe*, but also the socio-cultural contributions of Afro-Uruguayans in general.

CHAPTER 3

AN OVERVIEW OF THE *TAMBORES AND LLAMADAS*

Throughout this essay, I employ the term *tambor* when referring to the drums, as the word is commonly used by *candombe* musicians and performers in Uruguay. However, *tambor* is a generic designation for any type of drum. In many print sources it is not uncommon to see the use of an older denomination for the Uruguayan instruments: *tamboril*. Regarding the use of this term, particularly by musicologists in discussions of *candombe*, Coriún Aharonián states that “*tamboril* has some possibility of specificity.”⁷⁹ Yet, outside of Uruguay this term is less distinctive, since, in other areas of Latin America and Europe, the term *tamboril* is the denomination for various types of drums with very different distinguishing characteristics.

Afro-Uruguayan *tambores* resemble Afro-Cuban *tumbadoras* (also known as conga drums). The Uruguayan instruments are single-membrane, barrel-shaped drums that are constructed by shaping and combining staves of wood, such as Brazilian pine or oak. Modern *tambores* often feature a much wider body through the middle than *tumbadoras*, which leads Uruguayans to describe the instruments as “pot-bellied.”⁸⁰ The open end of each drum is smaller in diameter than the side with the drum head. This membrane, commonly calfskin, is held in place either by tacking the skin to the shell of

⁷⁹ “‘*tamboril*’ tiene alguna posibilidad de especificidad.” Aharonián, 118.

⁸⁰ This word was translated from the Spanish term, *panzón* (potbellied). In addition to this term, Luis Ferreira also uses the synonymous term *barrigudo* in reference to drums of Juan Velorio, a celebrated artisan drum maker responsible for this shape. Ferreira, *Los tambores del candombe*, 65.

the drum, or by using metal hoops to hold the skin with tension rods that screw into lugs attached to the drum shell.

Unlike many Afro-Latin percussion instruments, *tambores* are not commercially manufactured, and continue to be fabricated by artisan craftsmen, who often identify themselves through a special insignia engraved on the body of the drum. However, these “brands” are often not visible since it is customary to paint the drums with the colors of a specific *comparsa* or carnival theme.

Candombe drumming ensembles are called *cuerdas* (strings of drums). A complete *cuerda* will consist of a minimum of three *tambores*, listed here from small to large: a *chico*, *repique*, and *piano* (Figure 3.1). The basic musical framework of *candombe* is formed through the interaction of the *chico* and the *piano*, as the *repique* is considered an improvisational instrument. Historically, there was a fourth *tambor* called the *bombo*, which was larger and lower in pitch than the *piano*. This instrument gradually disappeared after the 1960s, and its role within the *cuerda* was assumed by the *piano*.



Figure 3.1: *Tambores*

Traditionally, drums are tuned by heating the skin membrane and wooden body of the instrument. Bonfires, built just off of sidewalks, are a common sight at *llamada* events (Figure 3.2). As much as tuning by fire serves a functional purpose, it is an equally important aspect of the *candombe* ritual, offering an opportunity for fellowship between members of the *cuerda*, *comparsa*, and community at-large.



Figure 3.2: Tuning by fire

Individually, drums are not tuned to a specific pitch. Luis Ferreira writes that a “well-tuned” drum is classified within the margins of a range of pitches between which each drum responds.⁸¹ Ferreira continues by citing Aharonián, who suggests the relationship is more about tension, as opposed to pitch, the latter of which Aharonián refers to as a “Eurocentric” concept.⁸² While observing and performing with, several groups during 2011-2012, I noted that drummers discussed tuning in terms of “raising”

⁸¹ “bien ‘afinados.’” Ferreira, *Los tambores del candombe*, 67.

⁸² Aharonián, 122.

and “lowering” the pitch, through the increase or decrease of tension, until they achieved a “good sound.”

Since *tambores* are often played while walking, one factor to consider when tuning (particularly by fire) is distance. Pitches tend to lower during a performance, and it is impossible to retune tacked heads while on the move. In contrast, it is not uncommon during parades to see drummers using a wrench to raise the pitch of *tambores* that employ the modern tension system. The *chico* and *repique* have benefited from this more convenient system of tuning since it is important to maintain higher pitches during a performance. In general, the more time-honored method of tacking is often only utilized with the *piano*.

Each of the three *tambores* is played *mano y palo* (with a bare hand and a single stick). The stick is generally held in the dominant hand, and the drum hangs from a strap (called *tali*) to the side opposite the stick. *Chico* players utilize a thin, lightweight stick, such as those employed by *timbale* players (See Figure 3.3, left). The *repique* is struck with a slightly larger stick, closer in diameter and weight to that used by jazz and rock drummers, although it is not uncommon to see performers using *timbale* sticks. *Piano* players make use of a much thicker, heavier stick—more or less the diameter of a broom handle.



Figure 3.3: Characteristic stick sizes

Organization of the *cuerda*

A complete *cuerda* needs at least one performer on each of the three drum sizes, although, in most *llamada* performances, groups feature between 20 and 70 performers on each type of instrument. These larger numbers are driven by carnival regulations for the official Desfile de Las Llamadas, which requires between 40 and 70 drummers. In order to satisfy carnival regulations, groups participating in the annual Llamadas tend to increase their numbers by adding drummers from other ensembles that did not qualify during the *pruebas para admisión*.

Organization of the drumming ensemble is the responsibility of the group's leader, known as the *jefe de cuerda*, who customarily performs on the *repique* or *piano*. Various factors contribute to the distribution of performers; they include the number of players, the type of drum, the role of each instrument in performance, the ability of the musicians, and neighborhood aesthetics. The latter is particularly important in the historic neighborhoods of Barrio Sur and Palermo; the first is characterized by a large number of *chicos*. Groups from this *barrio* use almost twice the number of these small drums as in Palermo, where the ensemble is more equally distributed.⁸³

Ensayos and llamadas

The *cuerdas* rehearse throughout the year in Montevideo, and all have established rehearsal times, meeting places, and parade routes. Rehearsals, called *ensayos*, are major events unto themselves, offering an opportunity for community interaction, since *cuerdas* are commonly accompanied by a large crowd that includes neighbors, friends, and, on occasion, tourists. My first *llamada* experience took place on August 7, 2011 while attending a rehearsal of Sinfonía de Ansina, a *cuerda* located in the Palermo neighborhood. The following is an excerpt from a blog I posted the following morning, in which I try to capture the essence of the experience:

Words can't express what it felt like to walk up Calle Isla de Flores and see the fire on the street and hear the drums being tuned. People were coming in from every direction to see the *cuerda's* first rehearsal of the year. Everyone there had some sort of drink that they were more than happy to share with anyone, especially the drummers: wine in boxes, bottles in brown paper bags, and liter Coke bottles filled with what I'm guessing is 7 y 3 (Coke and wine). This entire time, the street is filling up and sections of the drumming ensemble are taking time to work their respective rhythms. Slowly the group came together, formed strict rows, and then ... *CANDOMBE!!* I didn't expect it to start, but once it did,

⁸³ Ferreira, *Los tambores del candombe*, 70.

my entire core was grabbed by the bass of the *piano* drum, and all at once the entire street began to move. I can't explain this [sensation]; it was like a wave, and then being caught in a current.⁸⁴

A major difference between informal *llamadas* and more organized parades—aside from pageantry—is the role of the spectators, who become *llamada* participants as they follow the drummers along their established routes. At more formal events, a clear delineation between performer and spectator occurs. This division is fairly flexible at the majority of these performances, since spectators are free to move through the street or follow their neighborhood *comparsa* along the parade route. However, in the Desfile de Las Llamadas, the division between spectators and performers is clear, since the municipality lines the parade route with barricades to prohibit audience interference with the carnival competition.⁸⁵

The parade route itself, on Calle Isla de Flores, holds special meaning for the Desfile de Las Llamadas and is the site of many other *llamada* events.⁸⁶ The street begins in Barrio Sur and ends in Palermo. For many *cuerdas* from these two neighborhoods, it remains a traditional route for the practice of the *llamadas*. During carnival, Isla de Flores becomes the stage for the passing of the *comparsas*, as they move from Barrio Sur westward toward Ansina. The street is defined by colonial architecture, which when

⁸⁴ Clifford Sutton, “El río del *candombe*,” *Huracándombe*, (August 8, 2011), <http://hurucandombe.blogspot.com/2011/08/el-rio-del-candombe.html> (accessed February 26, 2013).

⁸⁵ The only other event to establish physical barriers between the performers and spectators is the *prueba para admisión* to the *Llamadas*. Both of these events are state-sponsored competitions.

⁸⁶ In Barrio Sur, this street now goes by the name Carlos Gardel, named after the iconic tango singer of the early twentieth century.

combined with the visual and aural components of a *llamada*, provides the experience of what Ferreira refers to as “a trip to the past.”⁸⁷

The *comparsa*

Although *cuerdas* function as independent musical and artistic entities, they also form part of larger ensembles when participating in organized *llamadas* that are called the *comparsas* of the *sociedades de negros y lubolos*. Generally, these *comparsas* are divided into three sections. The first features the emblems that visually announce the arrival of a group (Figure 3.4). The first emblem is the *estandarte*, which is a banner that displays the name of the group and often provides additional information such as the current year, the group’s neighborhood affiliation, and its slogans. The *estandarte* is followed by several extremely large, colorful flags, called *banderas*. Closing the first section are the *trofeos* (trophies), which are three performers carrying two stars and a half-moon.



Figure 3.4: Flags and emblems of the *comparsa* C-1080

⁸⁷ “un viaje al pasado.” Ferreira, *Los tambores del candombe*, 76.

The next section is the *cuerpo de baile* (body of dancers), which features various groups of dancers, some of whom are dressed as dramatic characters. First in this section of the *comparsa* are the *baileras*; a large group of dancers that perform choreographed routines. Following the *baileras* are the stock characters of the *candombe* masquerade: the *gramillero*, *mama vieja*, and the *escobero*. The *gramillero* is an old medicine man; bent over from old age, he dances with a cane and, at times, carries a doctor's bag filled with herbs for healing. The stuttering dance of the *gramillero* is balanced by the more graceful movements of the *mama vieja* (old mother), with her hand-held fan and parasol (Figure 3.5). The third member of the masquerade is the *escobero*, a warrior-like figure performing skillful acrobatics with a broomstick (Figure 3.6).



Figure 3.5: *Gramillero* and *mama viejas*



Figure 3.6: *Escobero*

Often, scholars define these three figures as “characteristic elements of the old *candombes*.”⁸⁸ Authors like Carvalho-Neto and Montañó assert that these characters, along with the stars and half-moon, are rooted in the traditions of the *naciones*. Aharonián, on the other hand, states they are of “remote and disputed origin.”⁸⁹ However, Andrews indicates that the blackface *comparsas* created the characters of the *gramillero* and *escobero* during the 1870s.⁹⁰ He further questions the “traditional” roots of the characters in his discussion of the *mama vieja*; a character he notes was created by *lubolos* in the early 1900s.⁹¹

⁸⁸ “los viejos candombes.” Tomás Chirimini and Juan Varese, *Los candombes de Reyes*, 139.

⁸⁹ “de origen remoto y discutido.” Aharonián, *Músicas populares del Uruguay*, 125.

⁹⁰ Andrews, 57.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 65.

Closing the *cuerpo de baile* is the *vedette*: a scantily-clad female dancer positioned directly in front of the first line of drummers (Figure 3.7). Next to the *tambores*, the *vedette* is probably the most popular figure of the *comparsas*, which is particularly clear in television broadcasts of the Llamadas during carnival. First appearing in 1948, these overtly sexualized dancers are also the focus of much controversy, since there is no association with *candombe*'s African past.



Figure 3.7: *Vedette*

Following the *cuerpo de baile* are generally five to seven rows of drummers. In the Desfile de Las Llamadas, carnival regulations permit a maximum of 150 performers. In addition to the elements described in the previous paragraphs, which are required components, *comparsas* can also feature advertising banners, additional male and female dancers, and the *regimen*—a group of invited guests who follow the *comparsa* along the parade route in much the same manner as spectators at a rehearsal.

Although I have limited the historical and contextual discussion of the *tambores* to the *llamadas*, they are by no means limited to this setting. Even during carnival, several *comparsas* put on elaborate stage shows (essentially *candombe* musical theater) in various locations throughout Montevideo, including at Teatro Verano, an outdoor amphitheater located at Playa Ramírez. Additionally, the *tambores* are often featured in Uruguayan popular music by artists like Rubén Rada, who fuses the rhythms of *candombe* with other Latin American musical genres and North American styles like jazz and rock. In the following chapter, I outline essential concepts for learning to play the *tambores* and introduce the basic rhythms that are applicable to most styles of *candombe* performance.

CHAPTER 4

LEARNING TO PLAY THE *TAMBORES*



Figure 4.1: *Comparsa Integración*

Learning to play the *tambores* is an oral tradition, passed down from generation to generation in the streets of Montevideo, the true schools of *candombe*. The human voice has minimal influence over this tradition, as it is the *tambor* that speaks. Since the voices of the drums are reliant on the physical gestures of performers, the process of learning to play each drum is as much visual as it is aural. Comprehending the relationship between the individual rhythms of the *chico*, *piano*, and *repique* is challenging when removed from their ensemble context. However, a basic knowledge of these individual rhythms and the technical requirements for the production of sound are fundamental to associating the music with Montevidean identities.

This chapter serves as an introduction to the three individual *tambores*, their basic rhythms, and their function in *llamada* events. Here, I supplement the notated examples of basic *candombe* rhythms with explanations of the characteristic sounds of each drum and the methods through which these sounds are achieved. Following the presentations of the *tambores* and their rhythms is an overview of issues related to the transmission and comprehension of the *toques*.

Candombe rhythms appear simple; nonetheless, visually understanding the rhythmic patterns does not necessarily provide an aural understanding. For that reason, the reader should refer to the bibliography, which lists several audio recordings that will serve as an aural supplement to the musical notation.⁹² For visual reference, a large number of video recordings are available online that range from demonstrations of the individual drums to full ensemble performances at various *llamada* events throughout Uruguay.

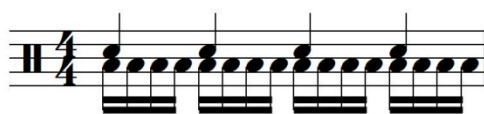
General Characteristics

Pulse and Meter

Candombe is highly syncopated music. For newcomers, one of the greatest challenges is recognizing the placement of the basic pulse, which, in terms of meter, is divided into four beats (quarter notes) per measure. In *llamadas*, this basic pulse coordinates with the feet while marching. However, in order to execute and analyze individual rhythms and understand them collectively, it is necessary to subdivide each of the basic pulses into groups of four sixteenth notes (Musical Example 4.1).

⁹² The recordings referenced in the bibliography are commercially available for purchase through online retailers like Amazon and iTunes.

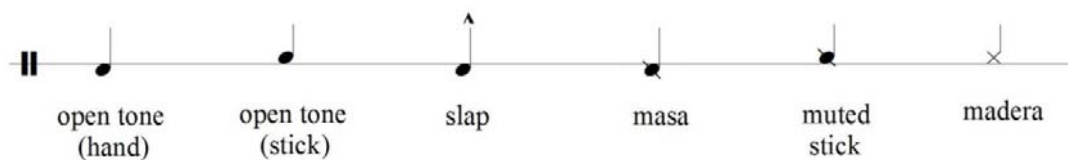
Musical Example 4.1: Basic pulse with sixteenth-note subdivision



Musical Notation and Sounds

Through a combination of hand and stick strokes, the *tambores* are capable of producing a wide variety of sounds. The musical notation and illustrations of technique presented in this essay reflect only the most basic of these sounds. I have elected to use a single line staff in order to distinguish between the strokes of the hand and strokes of the stick. Notes written below the line are assigned to the hand, and those above designate the stick (Figure 4.1). Additionally, special note heads are employed to distinguish between each sound. Note heads that appear in parentheses indicate that the stroke is played with a lighter touch to obtain lesser volume.

Figure 4.2: Notation Legend



The most common sound of all of the drums is the open tone, which is achieved by allowing the drumhead to resonate freely after striking it with either the hand or the stick. When using the stick, the fullest sounding tone is attained when striking just off the center of the head. The open tone is achieved with the hand by striking closer to the edge

of the drumhead. The hand should be flat, with the palm down and the fingers straight. The area of the fingers making contact with the drum will vary depending on the surface area of the drum: more for the *piano*, less for the *chico*.

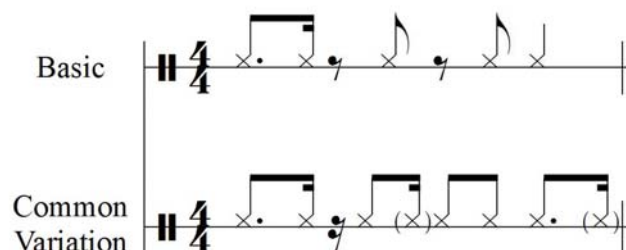
The slap is a much sharper, shorter sound than the open tone and is generally performed by *repique* and *chico* performers. This stroke is executed much like the open tone with the hand, except that the fingers are relaxed and curved, allowing the fingertips to make contact with the drumhead through a whip-like motion.

Masa, which translates to “mass” or “volume,” is a stroke that is unique to the *piano*. This stroke is realized by striking near the center of the drumhead with a flattened hand. Upon making contact, the performer presses the palm into the head, which results in a dry, yet heavy sound. In *llamadas*, as a means of obtaining additional volume, the *masa* is often accompanied with a stroke of the stick, which also adds a sharper attack to the sound. Additionally, performers often strike the head with the stick while the *masa* is still engaged, producing a dry and clicking sound.

Finally, the stroke known as the *madera*, which means “wood,” literally refers to the sound produced by striking a stick against the wooden body of a *tambor*. Unlike the other sounds described, *madera* also refers to a guide rhythm similar to the Afro-Cuban *son* clave that uses the *madera* stroke. Musical Example 4.2 illustrates the most basic pattern, as well as a commonly heard variation. In *llamadas*, the basic *madera* rhythm is performed by the entire drumming ensemble as a means of beginning a performance and establishing the tempo. During moments of rhythmic instability or ensemble phasing, *piano* or *repique* players will often take up the *madera* pattern as a point of reference.

Additionally, it is not uncommon to find spectators clapping the basic pattern during performances.

Musical Example 4.2: Basic *madera* pattern with variation



Individual Tambores and their Rhythms

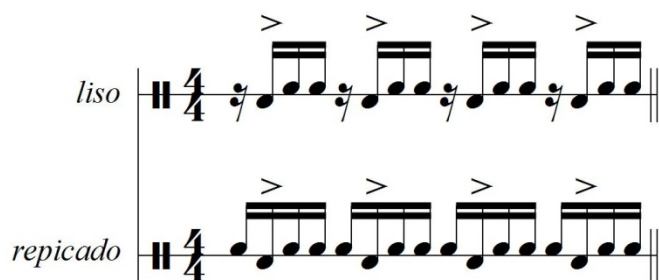
The following sections provide an overview of each *tambor* and an introduction to basic rhythmic patterns that are commonly performed by *cuerdas* throughout Uruguay. I want to stress that the following musical examples only illustrate differences of rhythm and their general applications in performance; additional elements of musical style (tempo, dynamics, etc) and their associations with specific performance practices and identity are examined in the next chapter. The order in which the tambores are presented reflects the traditional sequence in which each *tambor* is learned.

The *chico*

In Spanish, *chico* literally means “small,” making the *chico* the most appropriately named drum of the three *tambores*. The highest-pitched *tambor*, the *chico* is often referred to as the metronome of the ensemble, since it performs an unchanging

and constant rhythmic pattern, of which two variations exist: the *liso* and the *repicado* (Musical Example 4.3).

Musical Example 4.3: *Chico liso* and *repicado* patterns



In *llamada* performances, when tempi are often faster, the *liso* (smooth) pattern is most common, since executing two consecutive strokes of the stick is easier than the three of the *repicado* pattern. Aside from technical demands linked to tempo, the *repicado* (ringing) is generally reserved for musical situations in which the *repique* is absent or not as prominently featured (for instance, when accompanying the song form of *candombe*).

Both *chico* patterns are characterized by the accented note of the hand that occurs on the sixteenth note immediately following each basic pulse. All of the strokes are performed as open tones, although various interpretations exist about the volume of the accent and the phrasing of the repeated sixteenth-based motive. Regardless of the interpretation of the *chico* rhythm, the actual motions used to execute the rhythm vary only in force and velocity. The accented note of the hand utilizes a vertical motion which incorporates the entire forearm. Ferreira states that, upon striking the drumhead, “the hand immediately lifts to the starting position with the same momentum with which it

was lowered.”⁹³ This forearm motion assists *chico* players as a visual and kinesthetic aid in mastering the timing of the displaced accented note, and assists in maintaining overall ensemble cohesion.



Figure 4.3: *Piano* and *chico* performers with the *comparsa* Eleguá

The *piano*

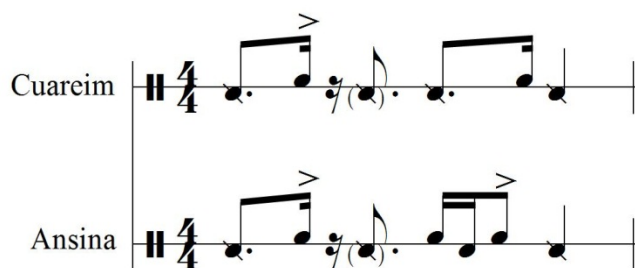
The *piano* is the largest, and therefore, the lowest-pitched instrument of the trio of *tambores*. It is also the most curiously named. Ferreira speculates that the label is a

⁹³ “la mano pegue e inmediatamente suba hasta el punto inicial con el mismo impulse con que bajó.” Ferreira, *Los tambores del candombe*, 96.

“functional analogy between the basic rhythm of the *piano* drum ... and the sonorous planes of the keyboard piano in the old tango orchestras.”⁹⁴

The rhythm of the *piano* provides a strong foundation against the displaced rhythm of the *chico*, and together, these two drums form the basic musical framework for *candombe* performances. Additionally, *piano* rhythms are a fundamental element in defining *candombe* identity, particularly associations with two neighborhoods in central Montevideo: Barrio Sur (Cuareim) and Palermo (Ansina). Musical Example 4.4 illustrates two commonly performed variations associated with each of these respective neighborhoods; note that the primary difference occurs during the third beat.

Musical Example 4.4: Cuareim and Ansina *piano* patterns

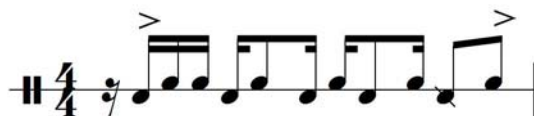


Although ensembles generally have a base *piano* rhythm, not all *piano* players in a *cuerda* are required to maintain a specific pattern continuously. Experienced performers will take part in call and response practices with other *piano* players, as well as with *repique* players. Rhythms that break from the basic *piano* pattern are called *repicados*; one player calls, and, in turn, the other players answer across 2-3 metric cycles. Musical Example 4.5 illustrates a commonly performed *piano repicado*. Ferreira notes that “all of

⁹⁴ “una analogía funcional entre el toque básico del piano tambor ... y la planos sonorous del piano-teclado de las viejas orquestas de tango” Ibid., 65.

the *piano repicados* begin with a powerful and surprising stroke on the second sixteenth note of the first basic pulse ... adding to the energy of the hand [stroke] by the *chico*.⁹⁵

Musical Example 4.5: Common *piano repicado*



The *repique*

The final drum in the sequence of *tambores* is the *repique*, which ranks between the *chico* and *piano* in both size and pitch. Ferreira states that, like the *chico*, the *repique* has an obvious name, explaining: “it is the *tambor* that rings (*se re-pica*), which is to say that [the *repiques*] play the most strokes.”⁹⁶

The *repique* is often described as an improvisatory drum. Although this is true in many respects, specific rhythms or rhythmic formulas are commonly employed by *repique* players to assist in managing the various aspects of the group dynamic. One of these rhythms is the *madera*. In moments of rhythmic instability, at least one *repique* will provide some form of *madera* as a frame of reference for the rest of the ensemble. Additionally, *madera* is heard during moments of improvisation; while one *repique* player solos, the others will play *madera* until it is time for that player’s solo.

A second manner in which the *repique* contributes to the overall group dynamic is through the use of a rhythmic formula called a *repicado* (Musical Example 4.6). As with

⁹⁵ “Todos los toques de repicado del piano comienzan con un potente y sorpresivo golpe en el tiempo 1y del primer semiciclo rítmico ... el repicado se suma a la energía de la mano del tambor chico.” Ibid., 119.

⁹⁶ “es el tambor en el que se re-pica es decir se tocan más golpes.” Ibid., 65.

the *piano*, this term applies to moments of greater rhythmic density. On the *repique*, these patterns are highly syncopated and create a great deal of rhythmic tension against the rhythms of the *chico* and *piano*. In a similar manner to the *piano*, *repique* players begin these rhythms on the second sixteenth note of the first basic pulse. Moreover, as with the accented notes of the *chico*, the strokes of the hand (in this case, slaps) are always stronger than those of the stick.

Musical Example 4.6: Common *repique repicado*.



Finally, a *repique* provides musical signals to the other members of the *cuerda*, particularly when ending a performance. Since the closing rhythm is performed by one player, it is a common practice for the *cuerda* to lower the overall dynamic level in order to hear the *repique* signal. The final example shows a standard closing pattern; the vertical accents over the stick strokes denote rim-shots (Musical Example 4.7).⁹⁷

Musical Example 4.7: Common *repique* pattern to end a performance



⁹⁷ On the *tambores*, rim-shots are executed by striking both the membrane and the rim with the stick at the same moment. The result is a sharp, piercing sound.



Figure 4.4: *Repique* with the *comparsa* La Magía.

Transmission and Comprehension

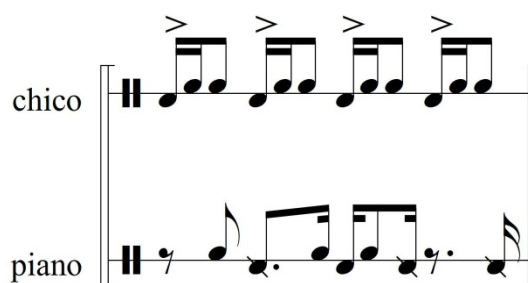
For drumming traditionalists, it is fundamental to master the rhythm of the *chico* before learning to play the other *tambores*. However, for those new to *candombe* drumming, the displaced accent can present a challenge. Coriún Aharonián comments on the difficulty of learning the *liso* pattern in particular, stating: “the silent figure on the ‘strong beat’ (and three strokes following this), is practically unplayable by an individual pertaining to the dominant Western culture.”⁹⁸

The truth is that the displaced accent of the *chico* pattern causes problems for almost anyone unfamiliar with *candombe*; understanding comes through cultural exposure. The tendency is to aurally interpret the accent as the strong beat. On different

⁹⁸ "La figuración con silencio en el 'tiempo fuerte' (y tres golpes fuera de éste) es prácticamente intocable para un individuo perteneciente a la cultura occidental dominante." Aharonián, 85.

occasions throughout my fieldwork in 2011-12, I had the opportunity to question several visitors from the United States about their interpretations of the meter by asking them to “clap where they felt the beat.” My intention was to determine if their sense of the phrase matched my initial interpretations of the rhythm. In each instance, the accents performed by the *chico* were perceived as the strong pulse, with the initial open stick stroke of the *piano* heard as the “&” of beat one (Musical Example 3.6).⁹⁹

Musical Example 4.8: Displaced Ansina Rhythm.



As I myself learned, the ability to interpret the phrasing of *candombe* rhythms comes through constant exposure. I opened this chapter by highlighting the status of *candombe* as an oral tradition, and noted that the true schools are the streets, where drumming groups traditionally rehearse. Aharonián once again argues that “the tradition of the *llamada* of the *tamboril* possesses an internal musical logic that is totally foreign to someone from the dominant European culture. ... They do not understand that this world is not entered through a few classes.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ In each instance, these “tests” were conducted while listening to groups performing the Ansina rhythm.

¹⁰⁰ “La tradición de la llamada del tamboril posee una lógica musical interna que es totalmente ajena a la europea dominante. ... No logran entender que no se entra a su mundo en un par de clases.” Aharonián, 135.

However, in the last twenty years or so, more formal “schools” of *candombe* have become increasingly popular, as members of the “dominant European culture” (which for Aharonián includes both Uruguayans and foreign visitors) are willing to pay to learn to play a drum. In some instances, the students are integrated into *comparsas* that take the name of the school, providing an opportunity to put into practice what they learn in a classroom or private lesson setting.¹⁰¹

In learning to play the *tambores*, I can say that my most valuable experiences came from observing knowledgeable musicians, listening to Álvaro Salas at Mundo Afro, following Sinfonía de Ansina along the Calle Isla de Flores, and playing *piano* next to the members of the Taller de Percusión Huracán Buceo. A common theme in each of these environments was learning through seeing and hearing, rather than talking about how to execute or interpret a rhythm.

In this regard I agree with Aharonián; although rhythm can be learned, the world of *candombe* cannot be entered through a few classes. In Montevideo—and in other areas throughout Uruguay and world—*cuerdas* perform the rhythms of *candombe*, but their interaction produces what I refer to as “white noise” in many of my observations. These groups lack a distinct *toque*, which demonstrates a lack of understanding of the social and cultural significance of the rhythms. The following chapter examines these rhythms, demonstrating how their musical interpretation defines Uruguayan identities.

¹⁰¹ Examples include the Escuela de Candombe Integración, Tamborilearte, and Mundo Afro.

CHAPTER 5

TOQUES OF THE TAMBORES

The previous chapter introduced the basic rhythms of the *tambores* in order to develop a technical understanding of their application in performance. However, to appreciate these rhythms, it is necessary to understand their cultural meanings, which ultimately involves a discussion of identity. The *tambores* and their rhythms play a significant role in these discussions, given that, in *llamada* performances, musical and cultural identities are literally on parade.

Based on my fieldwork experience and interviews with *candombe* musicians, it is clear that the relationship between the music of the *tambores* and Montevidean identities is based on musical nuances, such as minor variations in rhythm, tempo, and dynamics. With more than sixty *comparsas* in Montevideo alone, identifying a specific *cuerda* by its performance of these musical nuances is challenging. Meaningfully illustrating these differences through musical notation is next to impossible.

On the other hand, *candombe* rhythms are closely associated with a sense of place. Often, the selection and performance of the basic rhythms serves to identify a connection between an ensemble—or individual—and a specific neighborhood. Performers and scholars frequently reference this relationship in regard to the central Montevidean neighborhoods of Barrio Sur, Palermo, and Cerdón.¹⁰² The collective rhythms associated with these neighborhoods are known as the *toques madres*. The names commonly used to identify the *toques madres* correspond to significant streets in

¹⁰² See Figure 3.2 in Chapter 3.

each respective neighborhood: Cuareim in Barrio Sur, Ansina in Palermo, and Gaboto in Cerdón.

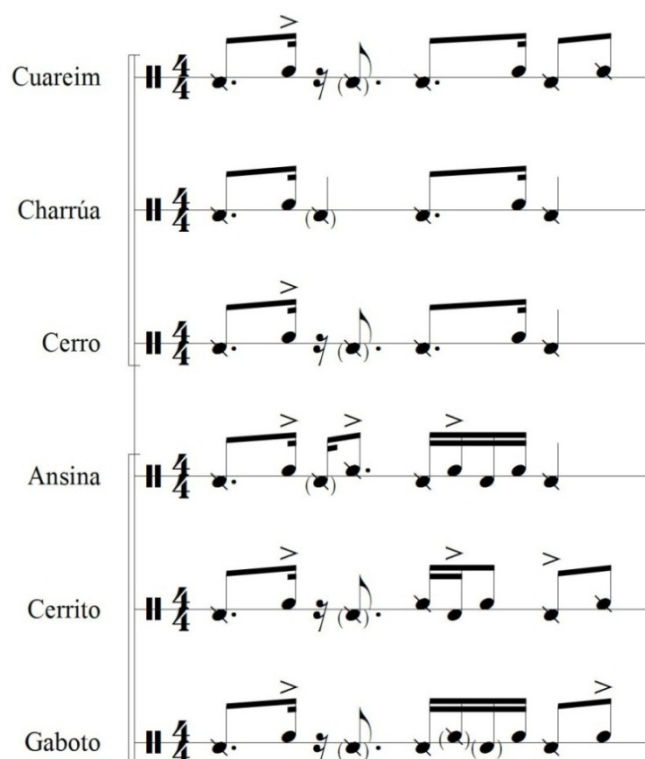
Rhythmic Identity

Many elements of rhythm are shared between the various styles of *llamada* performance. The basic *madera* pattern is used by every ensemble when beginning a performance, and common variations of the pattern appear frequently across the distinctive styles. The rhythmic patterns of the *repique* are also shared between the various styles and are heavily influenced by improvisatory ornaments and musical gestures that reflect the individual style of a particular performer. In the case of the *chico*, the *liso* pattern is the most common. However, the reason for the widespread use of this pattern, as opposed to the *repicado*, is based on aspects of stylistic interpretation by ensembles, which are examined in the ensuing section.

When focusing on the individual rhythms of the *tambores*, the most basic way to distinguish between their musical identities is through the patterns performed by the *pianos*. However, attempting to define these identities through the isolation of specific patterns is complicated, especially since multiple variations are associated with each style. Furthermore, variations are often subtle, as each individual performer and ensemble has its own interpretation.

Consider *Los tambores del candombe*, in which Luis Ferreira presents six piano variations that he defines as “base piano” rhythms (Musical Example 5.1).¹⁰³ Each of these base rhythms is identified by the name of a street or neighborhood, and each variation is linked to a specific performer from whom Ferreira adapted his transcription.

¹⁰³ *Los tambores del candombe*, 116.

Musical Example 5.1: Base piano transcriptions by Luis Ferreira¹⁰⁴

An issue with Ferreira's transcriptions is that, in many instances, he fails to provide a rationale for selecting these performers and their relationship to the rhythmic pattern he identifies. For instance, he attributes the Cuareim example to Fernando "Lobo" Nuñez, a renowned drummer from Barrio Sur. Nuñez, however, does not live on the street Cuareim and frequently refers to the Cuareim style as Sur (for Barrio Sur).

A more complicated example is the pattern of Charrúa, which Ferreira identifies as derived from Cuareim, although the physical location of the street Charrúa is in the southern part of the Cordón neighborhood. To confuse the issue, this pattern is attributed to Benjamín Arrascaeta, who currently directs Elumbé, a *comparsa* from the Malvín

¹⁰⁴ For ease of comparison, these transcriptions have been adapted to my system of notation that is detailed in the fourth chapter.

neighborhood. In October 2011, Elumbé was promoted as a representative of Ansina as part of Montevideo's first Llamadas del Patrimonio (Figure 5.1).¹⁰⁵



Figure 5.1: Promotional flyer for the Llamadas del Patrimonio¹⁰⁶

In one of my first visits to Mundo Afro, I played each of Ferreira's *piano* transcriptions for Álvaro Salas, who identified each variation as either Sur (Cuareim) or Ansina.¹⁰⁷ As we continued to discuss Ferreira's transcriptions, Álvaro impressed upon me that these transcriptions reflect the performers, who in each instance share a profound personal connection to the neighborhoods that Ferreira identifies as styles. On many occasions, when I would question Álvaro about the rhythm of a specific neighborhood, he would tell me: "There are two [patterns]: Ansina and Sur. But everyone has their own *toque*; I have my *toque*, and you have your *toque*. These are distinct."

¹⁰⁵ The Llamadas del Patrimonio featured eight *comparsas* that represent the traditional *toques* of the *tambores*; two groups from Cuareim, two from Gaboto, and four from Ansina.

¹⁰⁶ Flyers were distributed by the Uruguayan Ministry of Education and Culture.

¹⁰⁷ Interview from September 5, 2011.

To Ferreira's credit, he follows his transcriptions with the following statement:

"The two most differentiated styles are those of Ansina (Palermo) and Cuareim (Barrio Sur), from which the styles of the remaining neighborhoods are said to derive."¹⁰⁸ In later paragraphs, Ferreira explains that the first three rhythmic variations are derived from Sur, and the latter three are associated with Palermo.

Through my performance of Ferreira's transcriptions for *candombe* musicians, I was able to identify two additional problems. First, I initially lacked an aural awareness of the stylistic differences that affected the interpretation of each rhythm. Furthermore, because I performed these patterns outside of the context of collective performance, the presentation of only one metric cycle was never enough for listeners to identify a pattern beyond Cuareim or Ansina.

Because of these issues, it is important to define the rhythmic identities of Barrio Sur and Palermo. The transcriptions that follow illustrate commonly performed variations of the *piano* patterns that are closely associated with the styles of these two neighborhoods. These variations result from demonstrations by individual drummers, as well as the composite rhythms from various ensemble performances.

As noted previously, the fundamental difference in the *piano* patterns of Cuareim and Ansina occurs during the third basic pulse. Of the two styles, Cuareim (or Sur), is commonly characterized as more simple, or traditional than other *toques*.¹⁰⁹ In terms of

¹⁰⁸ "Los dos estilos más diferenciados son el de Ansina (barrio Palermo) y el de Cuareim (barrio Sur), de donde se dice que derivan los estilos de los demás barrios." Ferreira, *Los tambores del candombe*, 118.

¹⁰⁹ "Sur" is short for Barrio Sur. Also, the street Cuareim is today known as Zelmar Michelini in Barrio Sur, although the original name is maintained in the Centro neighborhood.

simplicity, this style certainly features the least amount of variation in the patterns of the *piano* (Musical Example 5.2).

Musical Example 5.2: Cuareim *piano* patterns



The first two examples are modern interpretations of the Cuareim pattern. In the second example, the legato marking indicates the note is defined, yet not as pronounced as an accented stroke. Examples 3-4 are considered older patterns, and I was told that the third variation in particular was an example of a base rhythm of the *bombo* drum.¹¹⁰ The final Cuareim pattern is similar to the third, with only the addition of the open strokes of the stick following the *masas* on beats two and four.

Interestingly, the *cuerda* of Elumbé performed this final pattern in the 2008 Desfile de Las Llamadas. Their director, Benjamín Arrascaeta, told Andrews that his plan for the 2008 carnival parade was to “revive forgotten drumbeats from the 1920s and

¹¹⁰ Interview from February 2, 2012.

1930s.”¹¹¹ In the *piano* transcriptions by Ferreira, the author attributes the Charrúa pattern to Arrascaeta, who was a member of the group Llamadas de Charrúa that formed part of the Cerdón neighborhood from the 1930s through the 1970s.¹¹² According to Tomás Chirimini and Antonio Varese, the Gaboto pattern first appeared during the period of the 1940s and 1950s, which would mean the Cuareim-like Charrúa pattern was an original *toque* of Cerdón.¹¹³

These associations begin to demonstrate the problem with identifying a neighborhood style by rhythm alone and shed light on a rarely discussed, yet shared connection between the *toques* of Barrio Sur and Cerdón. A particularly interesting reflection is found in Mónica Olaza’s *Ayer y hoy*, in which the interviewee identified as “Teresa” recalls an attempt with her brother to determine the identity of a *cuerda* when she states:

Sometimes we were at home and my mother would say: “a *llamada* is coming.” Then my brother and I would listen. “Ah, they are from Cuareim because the rhythm is more settled, slower.” Later I would say: “ah no, no, they are from Cerdón,” and I would look to see if they brought a *repique*, and if not, then alas, they are from Charrúa! They differed, and even now I feel the distinction.¹¹⁴

Earlier it was stated that the *piano* pattern of Cerdón (Gaboto) was derived from Ansina, which is much more varied and generally more rhythmically dense during the

¹¹¹ Andrews, 119. A video of a portion of this performance by Elumbé is currently available on YouTube; the specific pattern begins at 1:26. “Elumbe 2,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fEfm7mHVtdo> (accessed March 28, 2013).

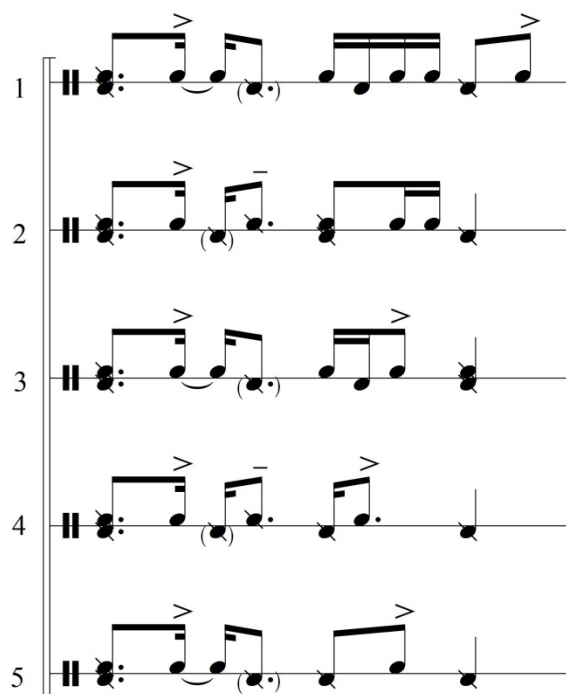
¹¹² Ferreira, *Los tambores del candombe*, 118; Marrero, 103.

¹¹³ Chirimini and Varese, *Memorias del tamboril*, 65.

¹¹⁴ “Nosotros a veces estábamos en mi casa y mamá decía: ahí viene una llamada. Entonces escuchábamos mi hermano y yo. ¡Ah! Son los del Cuareim por el ritmo más asentado, más bajo, después decía: ah no, no, esos son los del Cerdón, mirá el repique que traen y si no, ¡ay, pero son los de Charrúa! Se distinguía, y hasta ahora mismo yo si los siento los distingo.” Olaza, 46.

third beat than the Cuariem patterns (Musical Example 5.3). The transcribed examples are characteristic of the Ansina style, but are by no means exhaustive.

Musical Example 5.3: Ansina *piano* patterns



All of the examples provided are modern variations, although the lower two are characteristic of older styles, with the last being an example of an Ansina *bombo* pattern.¹¹⁵ Whenever Álvaro Salas demonstrated the fourth pattern in our meetings, he described it as the *piano* of Ansina from the 1950s. Keeping in mind that the role of the *bombo* was assumed by the *piano* after the 1960s, it is interesting to note that, if the fourth and fifth patterns are performed at the same time, the resulting composite rhythm is aurally identified as the third example. Perhaps illustrating the fusion of these two patterns, there were a few occasions when I noted *piano* drummers performing the third

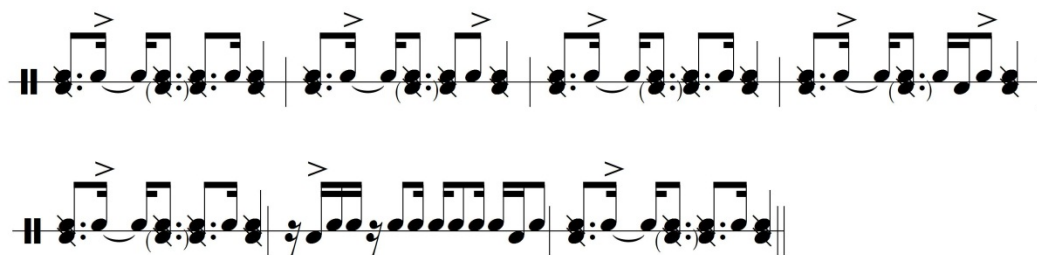
¹¹⁵ Interview with Alvaro Salas from February 3, 2012.

rhythm by initiating the third beat with a *masa* stroke, followed by two stick strokes: the first muted and the second open.

Of all the Ansina *piano* variations, the first is perhaps the most common composite ensemble pattern, which Álvaro told me first appeared in the 1960s and early 1970s. Note that in Ferreira's transcriptions, the grouping of four sixteenth notes during the third beat illustrates both the Ansina and Gaboto patterns.

At this point it is clear that the *toque* of Gaboto, or the Cerdón neighborhood, is not so easily defined through an isolated rhythmic pattern. The following transcription of the Gaboto *piano* style is drawn from a demonstration by Aquiles Pintos on September 30, 2011 (Coloquio Internacional de Montevideo). Here, note the use of both Cuareim and Ansina patterns (Musical Example 5.4). If a rhythmic nuance distinguishes the Gaboto pattern from the other two styles, it takes place during the second basic pulse, when the *masa* stroke will always fall on the second sixteenth subdivision; the “e” of two.¹¹⁶

Musical Example 5.4: Gaboto *piano* pattern performed by Aquiles Pintos



The alternation of Cuareim and Ansina patterns is not exclusive to the Gaboto style of playing. However, recognizing these *toques* is complicated in *llamada*

¹¹⁶ Márquez, *Método del candombe*, vol. 1.

performances, because different *piano* players often perform both rhythms simultaneously. The resulting composite sound of their simultaneous interaction is generally an Ansina-like pattern. However, it is fundamental to understand that a *cuerda* associated with the Cuareim style will never play the Ansina variation, and vice versa. Additionally, the constant changing of patterns by individual performers in the *toque* of Gaboto and similar styles, profoundly affects the ensemble phrasing, or groove of each metric motive. In the styles of Cuareim and Ansina, the base patterns are more stable, and although it is possible to vary the phrasing, it is far more consistent than with styles like Gaboto.

Tempo and *Repicado*

When comparing the musical factors that distinguish between the *toques madres*, the elements most cited in addition to variations in the *piano* patterns are tempo and *repicado* patterns.

In regard to tempo, the consensus is that the *toque* of Cuareim is slowest, that of Ansina fast, and Gaboto “faster than Ansina, but more variable and not as steady.”¹¹⁷ One rhythm affected by the speed of each style is the pattern of the *chico*. As I mentioned earlier, the *liso* pattern is most common in *llamada* performances, since the majority of the *cuerdas* play faster *toques* that generally feature the Ansina pattern. At fast tempi, the three strokes of the stick would be difficult to maintain for an extended period of time.

The employment of the *repicado* pattern by the *chicos* of Cuareim is not solely dependent on a traditionally slower tempo. In the previous chapter, I mentioned that the *chico repicado* was reserved for musical situations in which the *repique* was absent or not

¹¹⁷ “más rápida que Ansina pero más variable y no tan sostenida.” Ferreira, *Los tambores del candombe*, 119.

as prominently featured. The latter aspect characterizes the Cuareim style, and the *chico repicado* fills in the space that is generally occupied by the *pianos* and *repiques* in the style of Ansina.

The term *repicado* on any of the three *tambores* refers to a rhythmic pattern that is continuous. With the *toque* of Cuareim, these patterns are calculated when performed by the *repiques*; *pianos* rarely perform these rhythmic interjections. On the other hand, the *toque* of Ansina is defined by frequent *repicados* by performers on each of these *tambores*. In Gaboto and similar styles, this practice is intensified. However, the performance of *repicados* is not a free-for-all, and an appropriate performance requires a high degree of communication between performers. In the case of *piano* players, generally three to four of the most experienced are designated to perform the *repicados*, while those remaining maintain the base pattern.

These two stylistic practices greatly influence the manner in which performers execute their rhythms, which in turn influences the identities of the *toques*. Cuareim is described as smooth or calm in contrast to the more aggressive style of Ansina. Obviously, differences in the technical execution of the rhythms results in varying levels of dynamics and timbres. The smooth quality of Cuareim reflects balance between the dynamic levels of the hand and the stick. In the styles of Ansina and Gaboto, the accented notes become more dominant; the tones of the *chicos* are sharper, and the *masas* of the *pianos* are heavier.

Drumming and *Candombe* Identity

Some of the most defining characteristics of the *toques madres* have little to do with musical performance. In some cases, a *cuerda* will fail to perform the previously outlined elements of musical style, in turn, calling into question its identity.

I first became aware of the notion of a *cuerda* losing its identity in February 2012, shortly after the announcement of the results of the Desfile de Las Llamadas. The *comparsa* Cuareim 1080 (C-1080) received the prize for the best *cuerda de tambores*. When talking with *candombe* musicians following the announcement, many told me that this victory did not result from the group's performance of the *toque* of Cuareim, noting that the tempo was too fast and the *repicados* too numerous.

I have since analyzed several recordings from the 2012 parade, and indeed found that the tempo was incredibly fast, which in turn, forced a more aggressive style of playing. My interpretation of the groups' performance of *repicados* is that there was still a strong contrast between the number performed by C-1080 and the amount performed by *cuerdas* associated with the styles of Ansina and Gaboto. Furthermore, the *pianos* never deviated from the basic Cuareim pattern, except when individuals executed *repicados* or during the performance of a *corte*.

Regardless of the musical interpretation of the *toque* of Cuareim by C-1080 on that night in February 2012, it is impossible to identify this *comparsa* as anything other than a representative of Cuareim and the Barrio Sur. The name of the ensemble itself is a reference to the street address where the *conventillo* Medio Mundo was located. Waldemar "Cachila" Silva, the director of C-1080, performed with Morenada, the legendary *comparsa* from Barrio Sur, which was founded and directed by his father, Juan

Angel Silva. Today, Cachila's sons continue to lead the *cuerda* C-1080, which rehearses weekly in Barrio Sur.

As C-1080 illustrates, the identities of the *toques madres* are often determined by a cultural or historic relationship between the performers and a neighborhood. These relationships are clearly visible with the *toques* Sur and Gaboto. The *toque* of Gaboto is directly attributed to the Pintos brothers, Alfonso and Aquiles, who developed the style as residents of the Gaboto *conventillo*. Both men continue to lead the *cuerdas* of the *comparsas* most commonly associated with this style: Alfonso with Sarabanda, and Aquiles with Zumbaé (Figure 5.2). Additionally, the children of both musicians continue to play an active role in the organizational structure of the *comparsas* as directors and performers.



Figure 5.2: Aquiles Pintos, March 2012

Ansina is also defined by these types of familial and historical relationships. Names like Oviedo, Gularte, and Giménez are synonymous with this *toque*. The *cuerda* of Sinfonía de Ansina is a vibrant part of the Palermo neighborhood and can trace its origins to the celebrated *comparsa*, Fantasía Negra, which was associated with the Reus al Sur tenements.

Beyond the boundaries of these two neighborhoods, identity associations are often more complicated, particularly since the *piano* pattern most often heard is that of Ansina. The popular use of this pattern is perhaps reflected in the two words often used to describe the *toques* of Ansina: “warlike, rebellious, and expansive.”¹¹⁸ In the earliest periods of Montevidean history, the Palermo neighborhood represented an expansion beyond the old part of the city. During the dictatorship, the growth of *candombe* could be interpreted as a metaphor for the “rebellious” response against oppressive rule and cultural marginalization. Performing the rhythm of Ansina, the *cuerda* of La Melaza—an all-female drumming group—rebels against the masculinity of the *llamadas* and the social marginalization and sexual objectification of women that is commonly associated with *candombe* (Figure 5.3). Additionally, the popularity of a “warlike” rhythm also makes sense in terms of Uruguayan national identity; the country and its inhabitants often proclaim that they possess the fighting spirit of the Charrúas, an extinct indigenous tribe that was considered ferocious.

¹¹⁸ “guerrero, rebelde, y expansivo.” Ferreira, *Los tambores del candombe*, 168.



Figure 5.3: La Melaza, March 2012

Today, *candombe* continues to expand beyond the boundaries of Uruguay. It is possible to hear and see *llamada* performances in diverse parts of the world such as Buenos Aires, Miami, and Sydney, among numerous other localities. Many Uruguayans fear that this expansion will rob them of one their greatest national treasures. Fernando “Lobo” Nuñez articulates his fears over the globalization of *candombe* when he states:

The danger is that people are arming drums in Argentina and elsewhere, and they will not come to look [in Uruguay]. ... And today or tomorrow they will want to argue as they have argued with tango, Gardel, with *tortas fritas*, with *dulce de leche*. They'll say no, *candombe* is Argentine and the *tambores* too.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ “el peligro que hay es que hay gente armando tambores en Argentina y en todos lados, para no venir a buscar acá. ... Y hoy o mañana van a querer polemizar como han polemizado con el tango, con Gardel, con las tortas fritas, con el dulce de leche. Van a decir no, el candombe es argentino y el tambor también.” Olaza, 40-41. An interview with Nuñez is available on YouTube in which he also makes a similar statement, “Fernando ‘lobo’ Nuñez| Candombe | Uruguay,” <http://youtu.be/yF9COrDL2Io> (accessed March 31, 2013).

However, these fears seem unwarranted in the modern mass media age, as the possibility of educating the world about the “Uruguayanness” of *candombe* is easier than ever before. For instance, several excellent documentaries about the *tambores* and Afro-Uruguayan culture are available through YouTube.¹²⁰

Another fear relates to the deformation of the rhythm, and ultimately the character of *candombe*. One clear example pertains to the changing sound of the accented note on the *chico*. Álvaro Salas relates the sound of the tone on earlier, smaller versions of the drum to a “bell.”¹²¹ However, as drums got larger and adopted modern tuning systems, the aural focus shifted from the open “bell” tone to a more focused, sharper attack. Some drummers have expressed concerns that many groups are performing the accent with too much force, and, as a consequence, “dangerously changing the accentuation of *candombe*.”¹²² On the other hand, Álvaro expressed a more flexible perspective, telling me that “the accentuation [of *candombe*] changes because life changes.”¹²³

¹²⁰ Jason Rothe, “Fuego y tambor,” (2010), <http://youtu.be/0Lptado7zjo> (accessed April 1, 2013); UNESCO, Intangible Cultural Heritage, “Candombe and its socio-cultural space: a community practice,” (2009), <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/RL/00182> (accessed April 1, 2013); and “Welli & Candombe,” directed by Michael Abt for Movimiento ALAS (Montevideo: Vagabond Films, 2008), <http://vimeo.com/13195115> (accessed April 1, 2013).

¹²¹ Interview from January 12, 2012.

¹²² “peligrosamente está cambiando la acentuación del candombe.” Andrea Silva, “Candome: su historia y su toque,” (July 2006): 3-4, http://www.lamelaza.com/archivos/articulos/articulo_andrea.pdf (accessed March 31, 2013). Silva cites a study by Daniel “Tatita” Márquez (“Lonja y Madera,” Montevideo: 2002: 18), in which he interviews the well-known *candombe* musician Juan Gularte. Additionally, this view was expressed in by Joel Montero, the *jefe* of the *cuerda* Más que Lonja, in an interview I conducted on April 11, 2012.

¹²³ Interview from January 12, 2012.

Conclusion

As history demonstrates, *candombe* and the *llamadas* will continue to function as “sites of recurring dispute and negotiation over the content and meaning of national popular culture.”¹²⁴ Álvaro’s words about change reflect the frequently quoted words of the Ghanaian ethnomusicologist, Joseph H. Kwabana Nketia, who offers the following commentary about African-based music in the Americas:

From the viewpoint of the Americas ... it appears that the primary value of what exists of Africa is that it provides a basis for the development of tradition, for exploring new directions without loss of musical identity. Africa, therefore, provides a source of strength. That is why African roots must be viewed in terms of creative processes that allow for continuity and change.¹²⁵

One emerging theme among the musical and cultural studies of *candombe* is the way that the *tambores* have served as a source of strength. Regardless of the changes that take place in the music, *candombe* continues to provide a means through which many Uruguayans express themselves and affirm their identity in relation to their local and national communities.

¹²⁴ Andrews, 114.

¹²⁵ Nketia, *Ethnomusicology and African Music* (Ghana: Afram Publications, 2005), 335.

GLOSSARY OF SPANISH TERMS

baileras: dancers

bandera: flag

bombo: originally the largest and lowest pitched drum in a *candombe* drumming ensemble; function currently assumed by the *piano* drum

candombe: Afro-Uruguayan music and dance form that features drums as the central instrument

chico: smallest and highest pitched drum in a *candombe* drumming ensemble

comparsa: a group that performs *candombe*

conventillos: low-income collective housing

corte: a rhythm performed by the *repique* to signal the end of a performance or section; also refers to a section of a performance that “breaks” from the traditional *candombe* rhythm to feature non-Uruguayan musical elements

cuerda: a complete *candombe* drumming ensemble, featuring at least one player on the *chico*, *piano*, and *repique*

cuerpo de baile: a group of dancers in a *comparsa*; includes the *baileras*, *gramillero*, *mama vieja*, *escobero*, and *vedette*

desfile: parade

ensayo: rehearsal

escobero: broomsman

estandarte: person who carries the banner for the *comparsa*

gramillero: old medicine man, traditionally coupled with the *mama vieja*

jefe de cuerda: leader of the drumming ensemble; generally plays *repique* or *piano*

liso: smooth

llamada: refers to the “call of the drums”—spontaneous or organized drumming events; also the shortened form of the Desfile de Las Llamadas—a parade of *comparsas* that takes place during Carnival.

lubolos: historically whites who dressed in blackface; synonymous with *comparsa* today

madera: wood; a rhythm executed by striking the stick against the body of the drum

mama vieja: old mother, traditionally coupled with the *gramillero*

mano y palo: hand and stick

masa: a heavy, muted sound produced on the *piano*, executed by pressing the hand into the head after striking the drum

mano: hand

palo: stick

piano: the largest drum in a *candombe* drumming ensemble

pruebas para admisión: a qualifying parade for the Desfile de Las Llamadas

regimen: a group of people that follow a *comparsa* during the Desfile de Las Llamadas in carnival

repicado: a continuous rhythm performed by *repique* players; also a call and response pattern used by *piano* players

repique: medium drum in a *candombe* drumming ensemble

sociedad de negros y lubolos: “societies of blacks and *lubolos*,” synonymous with *comparsa*

tambor: common term used to refer to a *candombe* drum

tamboril: another denomination for a *candombe* drum, generally used in print sources

toque: “touch;” can refer to both individual and composite rhythms

toques madres: styles of *candombe* drumming associated with central neighborhoods in Montevideo

trofeos: trophies; refers to the stars and half-moon that are traditional elements of the *comparsas*

vedette: scantily-clad, highly sexualized featured female dancer in a *comparsa*

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