

lyrics within a larger discussion of language and sexuality in the villas miserías of Buenos Aires. The authors argue that cumbia lyrics are part of a larger shared vocabulary about sexuality and power that circulates among the people who live in the villas. They provide limited evidence linking the audience of cumbia villera to a specific consumption of newspaper and magazines. I would have preferred to know more about the three women, Gilda, Gladys, and Lía Crucet (p. 196), who stand out as progenitors of cumbia music in the 1990s or about more contemporary female performers, such as Miss Bolivia (a pseudonym for the artist Paz Ferreyra), or Agapornis, who have blended cumbia with pop music to add female voices to the male dominant genre. Cumbia seems a potentially rich area for understanding nuances of gender and working class identities and Semán and Vila's essay offers a first step towards a deeper exploration of this theme.

The audience for this edited volume would be exponentially broader if it could be accompanied by a cd or an external playlist. There is a limited attempt at a discography and certainly copyright law poses obstacles to including music. Still the inclusion of an appendix of essential "listenings" would have facilitated an excursion into cumbia for non-specialists. Engaged readers are likely to innovate in accordance with the genre of cumbia itself and find most of the music on you-tube.

Despite this criticism, the volume of essays offers an exciting foray into cumbia music and popular culture within transnational spaces. The regional variations and consistent appeal of cumbia music across space, region, and time underscores the hybridity of Latin American culture and the ability of the popular classes to innovate, create, and perform at the margins of the state.

**Kristen McCleary**

*James Madison University*

KRISTINA WIRTZ: *Performing Afro-Cuba: Image, Voice, Spectacle in the Making of Race and History*. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2014.

In this book Kristina Wirtz examines the use of Afro-Cuban imagery, dance, music, and language which animates Cuba's colonial past and its African heritage. By doing so, she "not only reflects but shapes the Cuban experience of Blackness" (back cover).

The term "Blackness" needs explanation, and Wirtz defines its use in the context of "a configuration of signs that can mark physical bodies, social persons whether as individuals or groups, material artifacts, social locations, dispositions

and practices, and cultural forms” (page 14). Furthermore, Wirtz argues that “the normative subject of folklore in Cuba is cultural forms marked as African derived” (page 14), thus the very category of folklore in Cuba is centered on its African heritage and Africanness.

As presented in the introduction, Wirtz’s mission is to examine and analyze “how performing particular stories about the past, on stages, in streets, and during rituals, shapes processes of racialization in the present” (pages 4-5). Looking at how Blackness is located and historicized in Cuba these days, through performance and performativity, Wirtz takes us through three spheres of performance: music and dance (which, in African and Afro-Diasporic religion and folklore, should be looked at as one interconnected entity rather than two different art forms); speech/voice; and stage performance. In her examination Wirtz skilfully and in an engaging and thought provoking manner employs Bakhtinian chronotope, the semiotic construction of space-time, temporal and spatial motifs within texts conveying differing subjectivities.

The concepts of race and racialization are problematized and challenged in this book. Wirtz starts with examining Cuban’s own perception of their Blackness as “both a matter of African descent” and as “a cultural inheritance” (page 5), i.e. both genealogical and cultural – a complexity embedded in the concept of Cubanness. When Fidel Castro claimed that Cuba is a “Latin-African nation” and that “the blood of Africa runs abundantly in our veins” (1975), he most likely aimed at a political statement associating racism and racial discrimination with Cuba’s pre-revolutionary period, but managed to define the cultural and socio-psychological Africanness embedded in the Cuban nation. This complex identity based on racialization and transculturation (a term coined by Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz), has historical, political, social and cultural layers. Wirtz chose to focus on its visual, sonoric and linguistic representations in rituals and folklore performances, and in the way figurations of Blackness are mobilized via these performances, and she has done this in an analytical and thorough, yet engaging and vivid, way.

Race is a complex issue in Cuba. Official records would rather base distinctions on “color” than on “race,” with a spectrum of colors from black to white, used in Cuban street discourse in relation to skin color. From Wirtz’s and my own experience Cubans are hardly concerned with the racist connotation of Blackness. They comfortably introduce themselves or others as *negro* or *negra*, and affectionately use the diminutive form *negrito/a*. However, by analyzing black folkloric imaging, Wirtz shows that Blackness in Cuban culture “is never *only* about skin color or physical type,” but also about “complex assemblages of signs contrasting with other complex assemblages of signs in an unending process of entextualization and enregisterment” (page 73). In fact by performing

Afro-Cuba, “blackness becomes a mask that can be donned for performances of primordial authenticity, national folklore, or cultural resistance, quite apart from everyday racial identifications and consequences” (page 76).

Music and dance are undoubtedly the most popular representations of Afro-Cubanness. In chapter three, Wirtz describes in detail Santiago’s two parallel carnivals: the official one involving judged competitive displays that take months to prepare; and the grassroots, street and neighborhood-level one, with its congas, paseos, and *arrollándose*, “the way the body ... naturally responds to the Conga” (page 124). “The invasion of Conga de Los Hoyos,” an “emblematic carnivalesque” moment, and a symbolic “grassroots exercise” representing a historical commemoration of the battles during the second war of independence, is vividly and sensually described (page 125).

Music and dance however, are not the main focus of this book. Wirtz is a linguistic and cultural anthropologist who researched in depth Afro-Cuban religion Santería. This book’s tour de force is its engagement with linguistics and semiotics, with its most intriguing part (chapter four and onwards) examining the three different Afro-Cuban languages, or rather registers. The description and analysis of voices, spoken, chanted, sung, and communicated via spirit possession, in three African-derived “registers” used in rituals: *Lucumi*, *Lengua Conga*, and *Bozal*, sets this book apart from other existing work on Cuban culture and Afro-Cubanness. Wirtz brings detailed transcriptions of religious chants and popular songs using these idioms, and claims that through this use, they perform “Afro Cuba.” The final chapter of the book, and in my eyes its most fascinating one, entitled “Brutology,” looks at the enregistment of Bozal (an extinct Creole language/idiom spoken by African slaves in Cuba) from a mimicking representation of Blackness in the “blackface” theatre to its adaptation by worshippers of Afro-Cuban religion, and maybe even the *orishas* (deities) themselves in spirit possessions.

The book, rich with theory and history, provides an engaging read. It fluidly moves from theory to ethnography, and is charmingly engaged with personal and vivid experiences, and by focusing on specific locations, brings the experiences to life. For example, the description in chapter one of “El Barracón” restaurant in Santiago with its slavery theme — a “thick description” of the restaurant including its décor and menu (featuring four photos from the place) provides a gateway into understanding the slavery experience among black Cubans. Following comes the representation of slaves, maroons and witches in Cuban folkloric performances.

This book not only contributes to a deeper understanding of Blackness and Afro-Cubanness as performance, but manages to shift the reader’s attention to less obvious areas of performance, such as voices and registers. It made me lin-

ger on aspects of Afro-Cuban performance that I had previously overlooked in favor of music and dance. After reading the book, I made up my mind to spend more time in Santiago de Cuba during my next trip to the island.

**Moshe Morad**

*Ono Academic College / IBA*

KIMBERLY L. CLEVELAND: *Black Art In Brazil: Expressions of Identity*. Tallahassee: University Press of Florida, 2013.

*Black Art in Brazil* is a terrific book. Author Kimberly Cleveland has written an insightful analysis of expressions of Afro-Brazilian identity in art. The book focuses on the work and lives of five artists: Abdias do Nascimento, Ronaldo Rego, Eustáquio Neves, Ayrson Heráclito and Rosana Paulino. Cleveland asks: what are the signifiers that make their work Afro-Brazilian art? The question and her subject matter lend themselves to a particularly clear discussion of the symbols of blackness in Brazil.

So what makes some Brazilian art Afro-Brazilian art? For Cleveland, Afro-Brazilian art is comprised of a set of visual signs of “blackness” that form, draw from, and inform a cultural literacy about the meaning of being black: images, symbols and themes that Brazilians would “read” as black. These signs vary across artists. The work of Abdias do Nascimento, for instance, employs images of *orixás*, spirits in Candomblé, or *adinkras*, symbols from West Africa, particularly Ghana. Cleveland sees in the use of these images and symbols an effort by Abdias do Nascimento to create a collective identity based on a common past and shared African roots. As she does with her examination of the other four artists, Cleveland examines the connections between Nascimento’s art, his life and his politics. She understands his artistic choices as expressions of his political commitments in forging a collective black political identity that would serve as the foundation for civil rights claims.

White Brazilians can produce Afro-Brazilian art, as Cleveland notes. Ronaldo Rego, whose work is derived from Umbanda, for instance, is white. But as Cleveland observes, the alternative is less possible: it has not been the case that recent Brazilian artists who are black are recognized for work that is not defined as Afro-Brazilian. In Rego’s case, as in Nascimento’s, blackness is signified through the use of religious symbols that are rooted in African influences. Theirs is a religious blackness that drew upon the first readily available symbols of Afro-Brazilian identity.