Associating Afro-Uruguayan Candombe with Niger-Congo Music and Other Afro-Latin Music

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DEDICATION PAGE

Dedicated to Miguel Castro, who taught me djembe when I was 12.

ABSTRACT

After years of government whitewashing, Uruguay is not often considered in discussions surrounding the African diaspora, even less so in conversations about African percussion or Afro-Latin music. Still, the transatlantic slave trade created a Black minority in the country, which has influenced the popular culture with it's Afro-Uruguayan drumming style, candombe. This thesis aims to clarify candombe's role as a contributing member to the story of Afro-Latin music and integrate it into existing scholarship which the Afro-Latin musician and scholar will recognize.

Because candombe is lesser known among studies of Latin music, chapter 1 will give background and history to this music. Chapter 2 will musically analyze the African foundation of candombe to establish ancestral traits which have become common knowledge in other Afro-Latin styles. Finally, chapter 3 will study candombe as a contemporary of better studied Afro-Latin styles, engaging it in the current conversations of Latin music.

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In the early 19th century, White Uruguayans began to grow deeply unsettled with the dances of Black Uruguayans. This culminated in the banning of Black Uruguayan's dance music within the walls of the capital city, and government laws sanctioning the performances to specific parts of the country.[1] Even before then, as early as the 1760s pressure was put on government officials to ban Black music, known as candombe, because of claims that enslaved people weren't being productive while they were dancing and celebrating.[2]

Over 200 years later, this same music has become a central part of Uruguay's largest national festival. Still, this story of overcoming suppression is often left out of Latin music studies. So, how does candombe fit into the existing studies of the African diaspora in Latin America?

Chapter 1: Contextualizing Candombe

La República Oriental del Uruguay (the Republic located east of the Uruguay [river]) is a relatively small country of 68,037 square miles in South America. As the name implies, it has easy access to water: to the east and south it borders the Atlantic Ocean and, to the west, Uruguay borders El Rio de la Plata, which eventually turns into the Uruguay River. Argentina lies across the riverbank and Brazil is located on the northern border.

Uruguay has a reputation of being culturally and racially European and for having a very low indigenous population. In fact, today, less than 3% of Uruguay's population is even of

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[1] Montaño, Oscar D. *Historia Afrouruguaya*. Mastergraf, 2008.

[2] Bonilla, Oscar. "Candombe, an Ancestral Beat." *Americas (English Edition)*. Organization of American States, November 1, 1995.

indigenous descent.[3] It struggled with other Latin Countries in a United States-backed military siege in the 19th century,[4] but has rebounded to become what many consider the most socially progressive Latin American country, with little corruption, the highest literacy rate, the world's first legalization of marijuana, and wide acceptance of its LGBT+ community. However, it shares with the Americas a history of slavery, racism, and genocide of indigenous people. The Charrúa people, a hunter-gatherer group who maintained a good relationship with Uruguayans, were betrayed by Uruguay's first president, Fructuoso Rivera, in 1831 and are considered extinct.[5] Moreso, Uruguay was also a lesser-active member of the slave trade.

It seems as if the progressive racial values of Uruguayan citizens (at least, as they portrays themselves) exist in a strange dichotomy with Uruguay's prevalent systemic racism and claim to whiteness. In the centennial celebration of 1929, the government proudly declared its superiority as the only Latin American country with not a single town of indigenous people and erroneously claimed that the small percentage of "Ethiopians" are an insignificant percentage of the population.[6] Still, however ironically, the document also acknowledged that the splitting

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[3] Cabella, Wanda, Mathias Nathan, and Mariana Tenenbaum. "La Población Afro-Uruguaya En El Censo 2011," February 9, 2014, 15.

[4] For further information, consult the personal account and research of J. Patrice McSherry in "*Predatory States: Operation Condor and Covert War in Latin America*".

[5] Lara, Eduardo F. Acosta y. *El País Charrua: Reposición de Trabajos Sobre Aborígenes del Uruguay*. Librería Linardi y Risso, 2002. For more information consult Sztainbok, *From Salsipuedes to Tabaré*.

[6] República Oriental del Uruguay, *El Libro del Centenario del Uruguay, 1825-1925*. Montevideo: Agencia publicidad, 1925, 43.

issues of race which plague the rest of Latin America were not of concern to the progressive country of Uruguay, even with a 1920 public school textbook claiming that Uruguay was for the White and for the Black, for the *Gaucho* and the *Charrúa*; it is not just for those born here.[7] Yet, the Blacks are an "insignificant" population and the Charrúa were made extinct.

Contradicting this claim to racial unity, Afro-Uruguayans have faced institutional silencing of their art styles and even today have higher-than-average poverty rates. Yet, although only 9.1% of Uruguayans are of Black descent, this country– whose people once claimed to be the pure Caucasian race– still has extravagantly acknowledged the culture of Black Uruguayans during the carnival season.[8] As we will see, since before the 1870s, candombe has been appreciated and celebrated by the White culture, even spreading into Argentina.

Literature about these African roots of Uruguay is abundant, as is literature about African influence in Latin music; however, to date, there has been no in-depth musical analysis of Uruguayan candombe as a function of the African diaspora. Other Latin countries have had extensive research into the African roots of their music; Cuban music alone contains literature like *Salsiology*, the *Garland Book, Latin Tinge,* or *Cuba and Its Music*, all which have been

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[7] *Democracia*, cited in Andrews, George Reid. *Blackness in the White Nation: A History of Afro-Uruguay*. Univ of North Carolina Press, 2010, 4.

Gaucho is a skilled Uruguayan horseman, a folk symbol known for bravery.

[8] Bucheli, Marisa, and Wanda Cabella. "El Perfil Demográfico y Socioeconómico de la Población Uruguaya Según su Ascendencia Racial," 2008, 13.

groundbreaking in their studies of Cuba's culture and rhytmic theory.[9] Among literature for other Afro-Latin countries are *Samba: Resistance in Motion*, *Merengue: Dominican Music and Dominican Identity, Africa in the Art of Latin America,* and *Afro Colombian Traditions.*[10] Method books on the artistic study of Afro-Latin music are plentiful, too, with the *Essence of Afro-Cuban Percussion and Drumset*, *101 Montunos,* and *Salsa Guidebook* as staple literature for the Latin musician, containing historical and theoretical information which is considered essential for the practitioner.[11]

On the other hand, Uruguay is much less often thought of as a part of the African diaspora, and its music as an outcome of the diaspora has never been musicologically interpreted, in fact the only comprehensive book on how to play Candombe is *Los Tambores del Candombe*.[12] Moreso, the literature in which the African roots of Uruguay are explored tends to approach the music in studies of culture, gender, and race, such as the articles *Blackness in the White Nation* and *Remembering Africa, Inventing Uruguay*. Needless to say, the amount of

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[9] Boggs, *Salsiology*; Olsen and Sheehy, *The Garland Handbook of Latin American Music*; Roberts, *The Latin Tinge*; Sublette, *Cuba and Its Music*.

[10] Browning, *Samba: Resistance in Motion;* Austerlitz*, Merengue: Dominican Music and Dominican Identity;* Gerardo Mosquera, *Africa in the Art of Latin America;* App, *"Afro-Colombian Traditions".*

[11] Uribe, *The Essence of Afro-Cuban Percussion and Drum Set*; Mauleón, *101 Montunos*; Vic Firth "Education - Groove Essentials."

[12] Ferreira, Luis. *Los Tambores Del Candombe*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Ediciones Colihue-Sepé, 1997.

English-language literature about Uruguay is even more scarce and tend to only be focused to studying the music as it pertains to culture and ethnicity, like *Blackness in the White Nation*.[13] Furthermore, a weighty amount of literature which features candombe reflects on it in Argentina, not its native Uruguay; this may be for a few reasons: most obviously, there are more scholars, students, and publications coming out of Argentina just due to population size, but also, candombe is being used as a form of resistance in Argentina– as a method for Black Argentinians to magnify their voice.

To bridge the dissonance between Afro-Uruguayan music and other Afro-Latin music, this thesis will examine candombe practices in reference to those of Africa and greater Latin America. Chapter 1 will give an introduction to what candombe is and how it is performed, chapter 2 will explore candombe as a descendant of the African diaspora, and chapter 3 will examine how candombe correlates to other Afro-Latin cultures that have been more subject to academic study.

Candombe is a musical descendant of the great African drumming traditions, born in the historically Black neighborhoods of Montevideo: *Barrio Sur* and *Palmero* .but the term has evolved extensively over the history of the Southern Cone.[14] Although candombe as a

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[13]Andrews, George Reid. *Blackness in the White Nation: A History of Afro-Uruguay*. Univ of North Carolina Press, 2010.

[14] The term *Southern Cone* refers to the countries of Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, and the four Southernmost states of Brazil. It is a geographical subregion of Latin America. More importantly, it is an area with a shared history and culture. For the purposes of this thesis, I will mostly refer to Uruguay, Brazil, and Argentina, as those are the countries most immediately affecting Uruguay.

standardized practice emerged in nineteenth-century Uruguay, the etymology is commonly accepted to have roots in the Afro-Brazilian *Candomblé* religion. The words' first usage can be traced to the 1700s, where it referred to Black dances, or *tangós.*[15] Ohio State University professor Abril Trigo wrote that Candombe can be thought of as having progressed in three historical stages: domestic slavery, post-emancipation, and Uruguayan folklore, with each era losing its religious affiliation, leading to the secularization of the music.[16]

The period of domestic slavery occurred during the years 1751 to 1842, when slavery was still legal in Uruguay. The music of enslaved Uruguayans served to accompany their religious dances and ceremonies, which were secret (the religious aspects had to be hidden due to forced conversion to Catholicism, but the tangós were not necessarily private) and exclusive to members of that group. At that time, the term candombe largely referred to those religious tangós, and not specifically the music.[17] Many of these were publicly celebrated in the market or town squares.

During the post-emancipation period of this music, ending in the 1870s, the term candombe came to refer to a matrix of dances performed during the Christmas season (In Latin America being December 25-January 6) to pantomime the coronation of Congo Kings under the idol of Saint Benedict. This festivity was already syncretized due to the number of African groups present in Uruguay. After this dancing concluded, the participants would start a

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[15] Ayestarán, Lauro. *El Folklore Musical Uruguayo*. Vol. 28. Bolsiliros Arca. Arca, 1967, 167.

[16]Trigo, Abril. "Candombe and the Reterritorialization of Culture." *Callaloo* 16, no. 3 (June 22, 1993): 716.

[17] This combination of dance and music as one unit is replicated in linguistic groups across Africa, many which do not even have a word for music.

procession to the cathedral, after which they would visit political and religious authorities. Outsiders, who thought of it as an amusing performance, were welcomed into these public celebrations. Because of this public interest and adaptation into the mainstream, those ceremonies as religious in function and African in essence went extinct before the 1870s. We will discuss the accommodation and adaptation of candombe to the dominant society, which occurred between 1870 and 1920, leading into the candombe seen in the Carnaval today. The modern-day candombe received all of its instruments, characters, dances, and rhythms from the drumming of the post-emancipation era. Modern candombe is recreational, commercial, and can even function as absolute music.

Candombe began religiously and privately during the era of slavery, with only members of the culture understanding its significance. Post-emancipation candombe became an homage to and representation of those dances, becoming available to the public and separate from its religious roots. Eventually, it became a practice available to the entire country and celebrated in the Carnaval of *Las Llamadas*.[18]

This shift from candombe as a representation of Africanness to a folklore of the country occurred in a circular progression: as White Uruguayans grew interested in the music, they unwittingly affected it, making it assimilate to their dominant culture and thus creating more White interest. Ironically, the interest in this African music by the dominant culture is the very thing that stripped it of its Africanness. As the music developed, it became attributed to two

[18] Neto, Paulo de Carvalho. "The Candombe, a Dramatic Dance from Afro-Uruguayan Folklore." *Ethnomusicology* 6, no. 3 (1962): 164–74.

specific styles, which became schools of candombe. They are the *Ansina* school and the *Cuareim* school, from which every drum *cuerda* developed.

Remarkably, the music and history of Afro-Uruguayans was adopted by much of the dominant European culture, a rarity among the rest of the Americas. Pierre L. van den Berghe, professor emeritus of sociology and anthropology at the University of Washington, explains the "undeniable difference" between Latin (e.g. Spanish and Portuguese) colonists who were more "tolerant" to enslaved people and Anglo-Saxon (e.g. English) colonists, known to be extremely cruel.[19] Although this does not mitigate the traumatic separation that enslaved people faced, it begins to demonstrate a difference. Yet, van den Berghe argues that the attitude or "tolerance" of the colonizing power towards enslaved people are not directly related to the degree of acculturation or miscegenation.[20]

Since the beginning of enslavement in Uruguay, White Uruguayans lived side-by side with their Black neighbors. Unlike the plantation culture that many countries cultivated during colonization, enslaved Uruguayans served as maids, cooks, launderers, and houseworkers, thus becoming relatively close to their European families. While most other American countries separated enslaved people, wealthy Uruguayan slave owners had them as almost exclusively a luxury, living in their homes, even educating them, causing enslaved people to assimilate.[21] To clarify, assimilation to the White culture by the Black culture, not a transculturation between

[19] Van Den Berghe, Pierre L. "Racialism and Assimilation in Africa and the Americas." *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 19, no. 4 (December 1963): 424–32, 425.

[20] Van Den Berghe, "Racialism and Assimilation in Africa and the Americas.", 425.

[21] Montevideo Music Group. *Rubén Rada - Tango Milonga y Candombe (En Vivo)*, Teatro Solís, July 2013.

both, is why Uruguay has had such relatively peaceful relationships. Van den Berghe addresses a similar occurrence; he mentions the *encomienda* system, a comparatively less disruptive system of forced indigenous labor in which they could be made to work for a limited period of time if their encomiendero would provide to them a certain well-being.[22]

In practice, encomienda developed into an unmonitored system of abuse, but it was created with the White savior intention to mutually benefit both parties. By comparing Uruguayan slavery to the encomienda system, we can begin to understand why Uruguayan slavery might have been less destructive for the Black population than plantation-culture slavery. The encomienda system allowed the indigenous laborers to still have a degree of home life and community (at least in principle). Likely, enslaved Uruguayans also had more normalcy in every day life compared to what enslaved Africans in the New Anglo-Saxon World were afforded.

Also, unlike many of the Protestant churches, the Catholic Church was content with baptism as enough demonstration of allegiance; thus, many Latin-enslaved Africans were able to maintain their own practices, including the people in Uruguay. The sad realization from Van Den Berghe, however, was that, yes, the slave trade created hostile slavery, but history oftentimes does not consider that the slave trade created a hostile *homeland* for West Central Africans. So, in comparison to the infighting that Europeans encouraged in Africa and the inhospitable transportation on infected slave ships, this domestic slavery in Uruguay must have actually seemed hospitable, thus creating a false sense of comfort for the traumatized person,

[22] Van Den Berghe, "Racialism and Assimilation in Africa and the Americas.", 429.

Furthermore, this desegregation was likely in part due to Montevideo's demographic, which was over 50% Black in the early 1800s.[23] Deleuze speculates that, "If Afro-Uruguayans had been segregated from the hegemonic society, they would most probably have produced some sort of minor culture, but because of their assimilation, their cultural threads had to be smuggled into the fabric of hegemonic culture".[24] Had those Afro-Uruguayans been segregated, they would have developed their own subculture with language and religious elements foreign to Europeans (like we see, for example, in Louisiana Black Creoles).

Historians cite this phenomenon of acculturation as to why Uruguay has been– and presently is– progressive in its racial system, which demographic evidence suggests started disintegrating around 1800.[25] That dismantling of racial hierarchies began partly due to the wars for independence; Afro-Uruguayans fought side-by-side with Euro-Uruguayans and Black soldiers were promoted to officers. In fact, soon after the May 18, 1811 defeat of the Spanish, the military contributions from enslaved Uruguayans were rewarded with the Free Womb Law of 1813; this law made children of enslaved mothers free, marking the first step into the Southern Cone's long process of emancipation.[26]

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[23]Anton, Danilo. *Nuestro Uruguay Piri : Descorriendo Los Velos de Una Historia Racista*. Mundo Afro, 1993.

[24] Deleuze, cited in Trigo, "Candombe and the Reterritorialization of Culture.", 719.

[25] Rama, Carlos M. "Los Afro-Uruguayos." *Cahiers du monde hispanique et luso-brésilien* 11, no. 1 (1968): 53–109, 58.

[26] Candioti, Magdalena. "Free Womb Law, Legal Asynchronies, and Migrations: Suing for an Enslaved Woman's Child in Nineteenth-Century Río de La Plata." *The Americas* 77, no. 1 (2020): 73–99, 75.

Lastly, the racial demographic of Uruguay is shockingly homogenous, largely due to intermarriage. The Uruguayan census notes that only 2% of Uruguayans consider themselves fully Black, which is even less than the indigenous population.[27] In such a homogeneous country, there is less of an "us versus them" conflict. Furthermore, as we will see in our discussion of *Mama Vieja*, most *candomberos* count Blackness and Black culture as an integral part of their shared history and identity. This is important for non-Uruguayan audiences to remember in future discussions on the performative aspects of Candombe, which may seem very questionable to cultures with a different racial history.

Today, candombe is festive, racially integrated, and commercial. Every February, in the southernmost, historically Black neighborhoods of Barrio sur and Palmero, Montevideo is swamped with candomberos, from evening to dawn. The first thing Montevideanos (and the many, many tourists present) will see is forty blocks of fences in the street, decorated city balconies, and white roads with Coca-Cola, bank, and alcohol advertisements. Large banners introduce the *comparsa* (a group who processes in a parade) and make way for their flags of color and display of trophies. Their exuberant entry is followed by actors in character, dancers, and then the drummers.

Note: children were still required to serve their mother's master until they reached adulthood.

[27] Bucheli, Marisa, and Wanda Cabella. "El Perfil Demográfico y Socioeconómico de la Población Uruguaya Según su Ascendencia Racial," 2008, 14.

Figure 1. Aerial view of Las Llamadas. Tenfield, still from *Desfile de Llamadas 2018 - Parte 19,* February 2018, Montevideo, Uruguay, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NjokmvxGPkA

This carnaval, Las Llamadas, was institutionalized in 1956. After that, each comparsa started creating formal costume and drum designs, and distinguishing rhythms. These designs include the clothing and the common "slave shoes" as footwear, but also the face paint, drum paint, and official colors. Las Llamadas is the most popular and commercial display of candombe drumming, with many candomberos recognizing it as being what keeps candombe alive and relevant, but with many others inculpating it for ruining traditional candombe.

The performance of candombe features a drumline, or cuerda; it is composed of three *tambores*: *chico, piano, and repique*. The candombe rhythm is a composite rhythm, split among those three drum voices. Candombe is played using *mano y palo,* which simply means stick and hand– a stick in the dominant hand and a conga-style downstroke with the left. Both drumstick and hand can play bass or rim, and as this paper will discuss, the stick hand plays a sub-Saharan rhythm on the side of the drum.

In addition to the music, many consider the characters which the *comparsa* personifies to be the essence of candombe. Racial differences between Uruguay and other diasporic countries are exemplified in the performance of candombe. Festival candombe is often performed in Blackface.[28] The faces of the performers are almost always painted in "African tribal" styles regardless of the musician's own skin color (i.e. a Black musician will also paint their face). White practitioners in candombe, who oftentimes will paint their faces Black are called *lubolos.* Sometimes the faces are painted to match the theme colors of the *comparsa,* sometimes light blue as the flag, with each comparsa having a reason for their colors. In homage to enslaved Uruguayans, members of the *comparsa* act as characters that acknowledge the historical root of the music they engage with; this means wearing evocative clothing such as straw hats, hair wraps, and rag shoes, with Black comparsas being considered the most "authentic".[29]

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[28] For further reading consult *Blackface Nation* by Brian Roberts

[29] Neto, Paulo de Carvalho. *El Carnaval de Montevideo: Folklore, Historia, Sociología*. Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad, de Sevilla, 1967.

Figure 2. Depiction of blackface in the Ansina cuerda. Tenfield, *Desfile de Llamadas 2018 - Parte 20,* February 2018, Montevideo, Uruguay.

Las Llamadas presents three essential characters: el Gramillero, Mama Vieja, and el Escobero.[30] El Gramillero (from the word *graminea,* or grass) is the herb doctor. He represents the African that was stolen from his land, now a tired old man from years of labor: hump-backed, barely able to dance, and dependent on his cane. The costume, consisting of a top hat, beard, tailcoat, and cane, is standard among all the cuerdas. His dancing is shaky and sporadic, but he keeps going because he's courting his *Mama Vieja*, as she flirts and dances away from him.

Mama Vieja is the owner of the comparsa. She is the enslaved woman who raised the nation's children. Uruguayans owe utmost respect to her because she took care of them when they were sick babies and wounded soldiers, all the while sharing with Uruguay the wisdom,

[30] Rossi, Vicente, and Horacio Jorge Becco. *Cosas de Negros*. Taurus, 2001.

stories, and lullabies of the African people. In fact, the famous Uruguayan musician Alfredo Zitarrosa wrote songs to her; he remembers living in Barrio Sur and seeing her: "A character from real life that I saw cleaning the sidewalk in the morning, when I lived in the Barrio Sur neighborhood of Montevideo. In the afternoon I saw her sitting drinking *maté*."[31]

She wears a dress, a scarf, and she fans herself as she teases and flirts with el Gramillero, who follows her everywhere she goes. Mama Vieja dresses in memory of the Sundays that enslaved Uruguayans were given off from work; the slave masters gave enslaved women clothing, makeup, and jewelry, so they could go celebrate and dance with the drums.[32]

Before them comes El Escobero, literally "the sweeper". He is a masterful dancer, and in the old comparsas, he would lead the band (similar to the drum major of a show band). He goes before the cuerda to sweep away evil spirits or bad energy before them. In early candombe, he would duel against escoberos from other cuerdas by dancing in time and attempting to knock the other off of his feet. These characters, in fact, are so essential, that they are represented in candombe performances outside of Las Llamadas, such as the Latin American music festival Ciclo Música Del Sur.

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[31] Zitarrosa, Alfredo, and Eduardo Erro Popelka. *Alfredo Zitarrosa, Una Historia Casi Oficial*. Arca, 2005, 273.

[32] Montaño, *Historia afrouruguaya*. Cited in Piazza Cossio, Norma. "Montevideo / Urban Landscape and Candombe." Universidad de la Republica, n.d.

Chapter 2: Candombe's Relationship to West-Central African Drumming

The amount of literature on the African diaspora in Latin music is evidence of its importance and presence. Accordingly, studying African musical practices has given researchers of other Afro-Latin music foundational information to rely upon. In the same way, studying the African lineage of candombe can give researchers a baseline information about the music. Although it is already common belief that the people of Uruguay are descendants of the Bantu linguistic group, a musically based analysis of both music could finally offer evidence of this.

Because of the sweeping force by which African people were brought to the Americas, there are several African cultural groups that need to be considered. The geographical evidence points to the Niger-Congo area as being the origin site of enslaved people; that nomenclature refers to what is the largest existing linguistic phylum, with at least 1,436 languages covering Western, Central, and Southern Africa.[33] The Niger-Congo is the area in reference during any mention of "Africa" in this thesis because these areas are musically related and distinct from the more Islamic-influenced northern Africa. The Niger-Congo classification also excludes a portion of southern Africa, which is correspondingly different in its music. Of these Niger-Congo groups, the Bantu linguistic family takes up the largest continental space.[34] Another language family that will be relevant is the Kwa family, in which the Ga and Ewe people reside.

In the following discussion of Niger-Congo music, seven connections to candombe will be made: the shared rhythmic makeup of the *madera*, the ngongon as a marker of the madera

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[33] Good, Jeff. "Niger-Congo Languages." *University at Buffalo*, December 24, 2013, 2

[34] Heine, Bernd, and Derek Nurse. *African Languages: An Introduction*. Cambridge University Press, 2000, 11

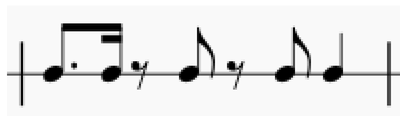
sides, the multi-drum contribution to one rhythm, the barrel bodied drum shape, the mano y palo playing technique, the time keeper chico/kagan drum, and the change in tempo of the music.

The most essential evidence of candombe as a product of this Niger-Congo region can be found in what candomberos call the madera, a key pattern which functions as temporal organization in Afro-Latin music. Literally meaning wood, madera is explicitly played on the wood shell of the drum when the candombe commences. Once the drumming begins, it is implied in any rhythm being played by a cuerda, although a candombero can play madera at any point in the music. Madera is also known as the "hambone rhythm" in voodoo drumming, "kpalongo" in Ghana, or– most commonly– "clave" (literally meaning key) in Afro-Cuban music. Because these are different terminologies for the same rhythm, I will use the term most commonly associated with the culture in question: bell pattern in Africa, Clave in the Caribbean, and madera for candombe.

This also means that I will portray the madera as it is referred to in that culture; Uruguay portrays it as a one-bar pattern written in sixteenth notes, but Cuba portrays it as a two-bar phrase in eighth notes. This is a curious difference in convention, likely a result of these musics being traditionally aural; there were probably just discrepancies in how the music was interpreted once it was subsequently put into Western notation, which does not quite capture the intricacies of some non-Western music. More research into this notation discrepancy would be worthwhile.

Originating in sub-Saharan Africa, the common use of this rhythm is evidence of the role that the African diaspora plays in the existence of Latin musics including salsa, pregón, samba, mento, vodou, mozambique, son, mambo, guajíra, macumba, and– among so many other

diasporic styles– Afro-Uruguayan Candombe.[35] Notice below the madera, which is the recurring pattern present in many African music styles.



Example 1. Madera rhythm.

A strikingly similar pattern was identified by Arthur Morris Jones in 1934 when he conducted field research in Africa, thus introducing the early concept which other musicians developed into Clave Theory. This theory is the idea that madera (bell pattern, as they use it) is a natural pattern in music of ethnic groups across Africa, and thus, is so in Latin America and Latin jazz.[36] Clave theory began as a notice of a recurring theme in African music, but now is the theoretical basis of Afro-Latin rhythm, being cited by scholars such as Ned Sublette, Rebecca Mauleón, Chris Washburne, and candombero Hugo Machado as the regulating force in Afro-Latin music.[37] Therefore, the madera is not just a pattern, but a theoretical and scholarly regulator of these musics.

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[35] Jones, A. M. *Studies in African Music*. Oxford University Press, 1959.

[36] Jones, A. M. *Studies in African Music*.

[37] Sublette, Ned. *Cuba and Its Music : From the First Drums to the Mambo*. 1st ed. A Cappella, 2004; Washburne, Christopher. "The Clave of Jazz: A Caribbean Contribution to the Rhythmic

In African music, Jones identified the pattern as it was played on a two-toned bell. However, there is a curious lack of bells in Uruguay. Further research into the use of bells in Latin America would be interesting. However, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Brazil, and Jamaica, among others, have essential roles covered by the bell. The membranophone-exclusive instrumentation of Uruguayan percussion is actually quite rare among the Americas. Extrapolating from how more documented Latin instruments developed, this lack of diverse instrumentation could simply be that Uruguayans only had access to wood barrels and cowhide, but it is distinctive nevertheless.[38] Even more distinctive is the madera being played on the wood shell in lieu of claves (the instrument), bells, or woodblocks. The madera pattern will be instrumental to this chapter's studies of candombe as a manifestation of African drumming traditions.

As the African diaspora has been studied, the multiethnicity of enslaved Africans has become central to the conversation– each culture having its own music, religion, social hierarchies, and languages. A review of slave ships brought to the *Rio de La Plata* port includes

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Foundation of an African-American Music." *Black Music Research Journal* 17, no. 1 (1997): 59–80.

[38] Immediately, it seems as if the practitioners of candombe must not have had access to metal, maybe due to the agricultural economy of the country, but this is unconvincing: the *bombilla* is a metallic straw used to drink traditional tea, horses– which are essential to Uruguayan folklore– would have needed metallic horseshoes, Gauchos have a reputation of using fine knives, and church bells were metallic. It seems unlikely that metal was not easily accessible to early candomberos.

334 ships from 42 ports, most having been along the western coast of Africa, stretching from as far north as the Senegambia port in modern day Senegal to the southern Luanda port, but also as far east as Madagascar.[39]

From this historical information, it is nearly impossible to trace the specific tribes that were taken to the Southern Cone, especially when considering that the ports themselves were multiethnic, with traders traveling to whichever port was available for shipping. In fact, it is well documented that the post-emancipation practice of candombe was a multiethnic celebration, not just among Blacks but with Whites present as spectators.[40] This explains the title Las Llamadas: it means the calls, as in the carnaval is "calling" the nations together. Although early Afro-Uruguayans were replicating the traditions of their own cultural groups, the presence of so many African groups created a transculturation among themselves, a mixture of their respective cultures. To reiterate, Uruguayan spectators, which are of Iberian and Italian descent, contributed to a second layer of acculturation. White interest in this transcultural celebration seems to have inadvertently hindered it.

Still, the musicians who gathered brought some type of musical precognition– a culture to which Afro-Uruguayans had been previously exposed. The presence of the madera rhythm confirms a relationship between sub-Saharan Africa and Uruguay, concluding that the musical precognition comes from there; ethnomusicologist Gerhard Kubik identified the aforementioned bell pattern as being shared among the larger Niger-Congo area where Bantu languages are

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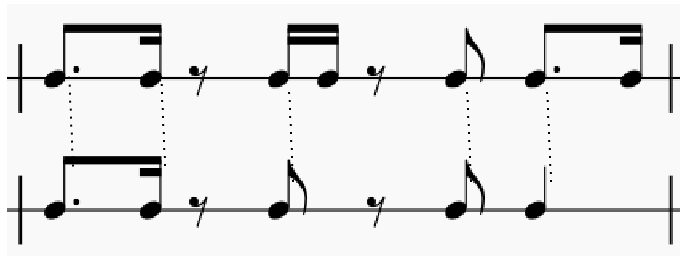
[39] Slave Voyages, "Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database" Accessed February 2, 2022.

[40] Ferreira, Luis. *Los Tambores Del Candombe*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Ediciones Colihue-Sepé, 1997, 39.

primarily spoken.[41] As such, the tracing of the madera rhythm points to a general ancestor for the foundation of candombe. Notably, it is rare for musical styles to be linked rigidly to ethnic groups; Kubik noticed in his studies that they are more often shared among "ethnically related population clusters".[42] All to say, African musical tendencies are shared and cannot be pinned down to one ethnic group; still, they can be traced to a greater ethnically *related* group: the Bantu linguistic group. Below is a diagram showing the bell pattern, which Kubik establishes as the musical key pattern for the Bantu language group. It is shown in comparison to madera and the points of connection between the two rhythms are depicted by dotted lines.



Example 2. Bantu bell pattern (top) compared to Uruguayan madera (bottom).

The similarities are immediately striking, only deviating by two sixteenth notes. Interestingly, the unconventional "a" of beat four is added on the piano drum during candombe

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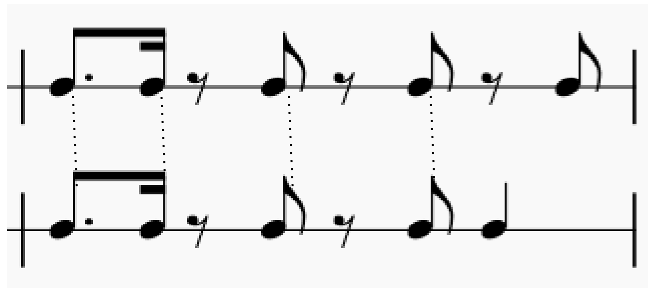
[41] Kubik, Gerhard. *Theory of African Music*. Vol. 1. Intercultural Music Studies. Wilhelmshaven: Noetzel: International Institute for Traditional Music, 1994.

[42] Kubik, Gerhard. *Theory of African Music*.

maderas to call the other drums into playing their rhythms. While this featured note might not be unique to candombe, it does not appear to be as prominent in other Afro-Latin musical traditions. This difference of only a sixteenth note strengthens the idea that candombe has direct ties to Bantu cultures, rather than just musical influence from other Afro-Latin cultures.

As a related example, below is a bell pattern for the atoke bell in Ewe drumming. It was transcribed by Steve Reich during his 1970 Institute of International Education funded trip to Ghana.[43] Again, notice the similarities to madera. As before, the madera only differs from this pattern by one note.



Example 3. The atoke bell pattern (above) compared to Uruguayan madera (below).

Practitioners of madera think about it as having two sides. In the grouping of the five notes, there is a side with three notes in it, and there is a side with two notes. This is because both sides of the madera take up the same amount of temporal space (two beats). In the examples

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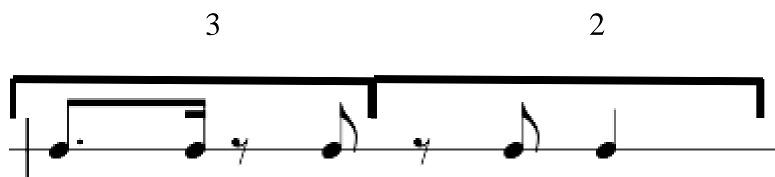
[43] Reich, Steve. *Writings on Music 1965–2000: 1965-2000*. Edited by Paul Hillier. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

provided, the entire madera pattern takes up four beats, but when the four beats are divided in half, there is a two beat half, or side, which is divided into three notes, and there is a two beat side which is divided into two notes.



Example 4. Madera with the 3 and 2 sides marked.

Examples 1-4 make it look like the Bantu and atoke patterns are naturally set in 3-2, as is candombe. 3-2 is common in all madera-based, Afro-Latin music.[44] However, the *lack* of a 2-3 madera is meaningful, as well. The fact that Bantu, Atoke, and candombe madera exist only in 3-2 hints towards the 3-2 being the most natural setting of these African music forms, and 2-3 being a later development that occurred in the Americas.[45] More analysis of African music would be required, but it seems that candombe exists in the most unchanged manifestation of the African bell pattern, while 2-3 seems to be a New World creation.

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[44] Brazil is a strange exception the Clave Theory.

[45] The American Hambone rhythm, or Bo Diddley Beat, seems to also be in 3-2.

The connection that madera demonstrates is solidified by comparing Uruguayan and African instrumentation. The piano drum was originally called “Ngongon”.[46] Coincidentally, ngongon is a Ga word for one of the aforementioned two-toned, sub-Saharan bells. Likely, due to the lack of bells in candombe, the piano drum filled the role by playing a pattern to mark the madera sides. Ga is a member of that Niger-Congo language phylum which Kubik identified; more specifically, Ga are of the Kwa linguistic family.

This connection to the Kwa family serves to establish the Niger-Congo area as the origin of candombe, but also reveals yet another point of connection in that the Ga people have a drumming tradition (Kpanlogo), which shares the triadic instrument concept of candombe. The ensemble includes three drums: Tamalin 1, Tamalin 2, and Tswreshi. The use of split drum patterns to create one composite pattern is replicated throughout Latin America, an aspect which we will explore further in chapter 3. In Ghana, where many Ga people reside, this idea of an interlocking pattern to create one rhythm is commonly found in music.

The tamalin are very peculiar square shaped membranophones, yet Tswreshi resemble candombe drums quite closely. Basically, there are a few types of membranophone drum bodies; importantly, candombe drums are barrel shaped, just like the Tswreshi.

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[46] Ferreira, Luis. *Los Tambores Del Candombe*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Ediciones Colihue-Sepé, 1997, 39.

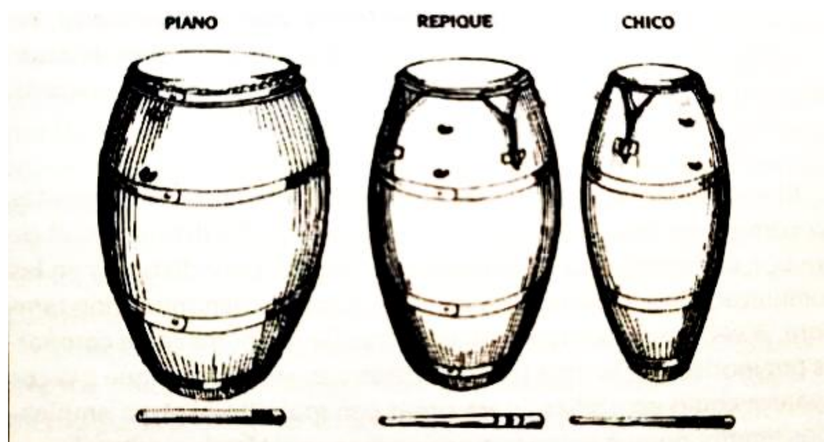

Figure 3. Shape of the candombe drums.[47]

Barrel bodied drums share a sound and resonance. They are characterized by only having one playing surface, an open bottom, and by having the widest portion in the center of the body. A culture that has barrel-shaped drums is more likely to be related to candombe drums than a musical culture with, say, goblet-shaped drums. For example, a djembe drum has less relation to a candombe drum, than an Ewe barrel-shaped drum.

The most notable of those Ewe drumming styles is gahu. Like candombe, it is a secular dance accompanied with drums played in the mano y palo technique, which could have been passed on to Uruguay. Video recordings by the Kakatsitsi Master Drummers from Ghana consist of multiple membranophones playing interlocking rhythms, a shekere, and a bell playing the continuous madera bell-pattern.

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[47] Ferreira, Luis. *Los Tambores Del Candombe*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Ediciones Colihue-Sepé, 1997.

Their performance at Eden Project demonstrates a varied use on mano y palo styles, including playing palo with either or both hands, playing on the head, and playing on the shell. At the beginning of this performance, all of the players are hand drumming, but when they begin a new piece, the players each pick up two drumsticks and demonstrate a range of techniques including muting, cross-sticking, stick clicks, and more. Specifically, the Kpalongo drummer can be seen employing a cross-stick, while the dundun drummer is playing with the right stick on the head and the left stick on the wood shell, and the atumpan drummer is just playing with hands. During the entire performance, players are using both downstrokes, upstrokes, and buzz strokes with the sticks.

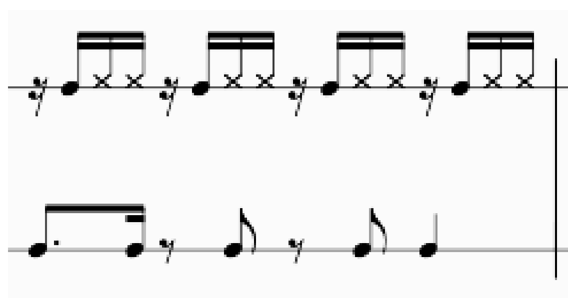
These techniques could have easily been passed along, as the Ewe people were some of the west central African peoples that were traded to the Southern Cone. However, candombe is much less flexible in the use of sticks than gahu. In Uruguay, the dominant hand plays with a stick exclusively while in Ewe drumming the use of sticks seems to be much less uniform: sometimes involving both hands, sometimes neither, sometimes they just change what they were doing.

Furthermore, playing on the actual drum membrane with sticks is an interesting shared aspect between gahu and candombe, as seen in the Kakatsitsi Master Drummers' performance. Using drumsticks on the side of the drum can be found in quite a few other Latin music (Cuban timbales comes to mind), but it is less common among the rest of Latin America for hand drums to be played with drumsticks on the skin head, although some like the tambora certainly are. It is likely that the ability to create different sounds was seen as a beneficial, or even rudimentary, aspect of drumming. This option to play with sticks must have traveled to Uruguay, where the carnaval caused it to become standardized.

Another intriguing aspect of the Kakatsitsi Master Drummers is that in every performance, they have the bell pattern playing the entire time. This will be explained further in chapter 3, as it differs from the “implied” clave of many Latin musics. Candombe, however, shares in the fact that the madera is explicit and unaccompanied for the beginning of the playing.

As mentioned previously, Candombe is a rhythm played in three voices, with each drum having its own rhythmic *toque*. The highest voice and smallest drum is the chico, which serves to keep time with a sixteenth-note ostinato. The piano drum functions similarly to a bass drum in salsa or jazz– it holds down the rhythmic foundation of the music. Finally, repique is the improvisational drum; although it has a traditional pattern, the player embellishes and adds variety to the candombe.

The chico drum plays an unchanging pattern of sixteenth notes. In every cuerda it plays the same toque, although the cuareim school of playing accents the second sixteenth-note partial of each grouping and the ansina school of playing accents both the second and fourth partials of each grouping. This pattern is what holds together the entire drumline. Players who are marching keep the silent downbeat with their feet.



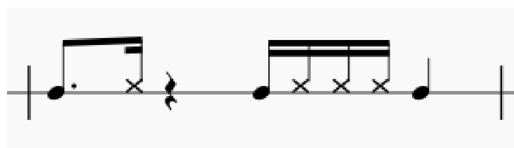
Example 5. Chico rhythm compared to madera pattern.

The other half of the cuerda's foundation is in the piano drum. The toque de piano holds the characteristic melody of each cuerda and establishes the rhythmic direction. There is a pattern for the 3-side and a pattern for the 2-side. Although the piano rhythms differ by cuerda, the base pattern is as follows:

Example 6. Piano pattern compared to madera pattern.

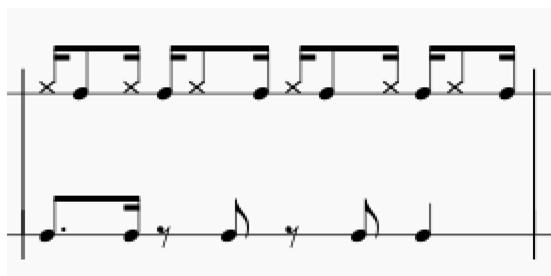
The biggest difference is that the Ansina schools add more notes, playing the second and third ("- e & -") partials of beat three, and most playing extra partials on beat 4. Piano players alternate between making *llamadas* (calls) and being the melody or countermelody. As exemplar musician, we can listen to Eduardo "Cacho" Gimenez play in the recording "Estudio del Cordón" funded by the Sectoral Commission for Scientific Research at the University of the Republic in Uruguay. In this performance, the deep bass tone of the piano part, is prominent; one can clearly hear the deep bass tone of the piano drum. The "1 - - a" pattern is heavy. When Cacho plays on the two side of the madera, he is adding in sixteenth notes with his

sticks. As shown in the transcription on example 7. Notice that, in comparison to example 6, it has more sixteenth notes added.



Example 7. Piano rhythm in the Asina style, transcribed from Eduardo “Cacho” Gimenez.

Repique is much more varied. It alternates between an intricate combination of three patterns, including playing madera, to playing its toque, to improvising passages. The constant ebb between patterns creates a conversation with pianos and other repiques, which requires an incredible amount of musicality from the player. Rhythmically, the repique might be the simplest pattern of all three drums, however, it has a very intricate relationship to the madera.



Example 8. Repique pattern compared to madera pattern.

Throughout the performance, the repique player has to remain aware of what side the madera and piano are on and know which feels and rhythms would fit best into that side. As candomberos will always clarify, the role of a repique solo is not to show off technical ability, but to hold a conversation and add ornamentation that makes sense within the music. The soloing and the fills (*rellenos)* are meant to interact with the characters and the dancers and the patterns happening in la cuerda. In more modern candombe fusions, they would interact and "drop bombs", as a jazz drummer might relate it.

These drum patterns and functions may hide another connection to gahu drumming. In 1970, Steve Reich went to Ghana and transcribed the rhythms played by master Ewe drummer Gideon Alorworye.[48] Reich recalls learning every pattern in comparison to the bell tone in Example 3. As if the closeness and central nature of the bell pattern were not evidence enough, it is the kagan drum that will seem familiar to our discussion. Kagan is the smallest bell instrument in the gahu ensemble. It acts in the same manner as the chico drum, even playing a similar rhythm. Reich notated that it plays an unchanging pattern of sixteenth notes, exactly as we see in candombe. Again, a candombe drum is filling in the spot of a Ghana bell. Below is Reich's handwritten transcription of the kagan rhythm.[49] Notice the striking similarity to the chico pattern in Example 9.

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[48] Reich, Steve. "Gahu—A Dance of the Ewe Tribe in Ghana (1971)." In *Writings on Music 1965–2000*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, 59.

[49] Reich, Steve. "Gahu—A Dance of the Ewe Tribe in Ghana (1971)."

Example 9. Steve Reich's Transcription of the Kagan pattern.

This rhythmic connection means that the gahu serves the same function as a candombe chico drum. It is likely that this time keeping element was retained when candombe started developing in Uruguay. The timekeeper is probably a functional aspect of the music rather than stylistic, being so beneficial in cementing a tempo and holding a cuerda together that the African musician instinctively added onto the ensemble.

A broad sampling of other video performances of Ewe performers suggests that there is a tendency for the music to speed up as the performance goes on. Although this may not be a standard performance practice in either culture, it is oftentimes used as a method to conclude pieces with a big finale, creating tension and energy. Cuerdas can be seen speeding up as the *desfile,* or show, goes on. In fact, this tendency will come back in chapter 3, as another common practice in Latin America.

Chapter 3: Candombe as a contemporary of other Latin American Music

Uruguay is so often excluded in the study of the African diaspora that one might be led to believe its reputation of only being European.[50] However, if the study of African music can help

[50] The general qualifier of "European" is one that has been widely attributed to Uruguay by its government, media outlets, and even many publications.

us to better understand candombe, so can including the art form into the academic conversation of Latin America; however, similar to how the Congo-Niger classification includes thousands of different cultures, Latin America includes probably as many. Foremost, understanding the culture of this music necessitates knowing that Hispanic America, Latin America, and South America are not the same thing– there are more cultural similarities in Hispanic America (i.e. the Spanish-speaking America) than in just Latin America, and there is even more diversity in South America, which includes the non-Latin linguistic Guianas (Suriname, Guyana, and French Guiana) in the northern part of the continent. The greater Latin America region even would include Jamaica and Haiti, who do share colonization and slavery with Uruguay, but most importantly, have musical similarities. Although these differences are important, having deep roots in colonization, there are still threads of similarities woven throughout the greater Latin America. These similarities place candombe music in the conversation of Afro-Latin scholarship; the comparison is useful because most other Afro-Latin countries have been afforded more scholarly attention, so looking into the similarities can give candombe studies foundational material.

Even countries that seem vastly different have musical threads tying them together. This is because the Latin American regions share a culture– from indigenous foundations, to Iberian colonization, to the West-Central African influence. For example, Uruguay is the most distant border from Mexico, but both share a heavy dependency on accordion and guitar, which traveled to the Americas with German and Spanish settlers. Also, Uruguay is linguistically distant from French Guiana, but they share the slinging of hand drums over the shoulder. Even the non-Latin countries share indigenous and African roots with Uruguay and the rest of South America. Also, it is often ignored but notable that the United States has been and continues to be a hub (arguably

the hub) of Latin Music, culture, and Language, despite not being officially a "Latin American" country. For example, the three Latin dance crazes, the 90s Latin Explosion, the 2010s Latin Pop Boom, and many of today's Latin Billboard hits have all been centered or propagated by in the United States (this may be why the geographically closer Mexico and Caribbean have been more influential in the United States).

This chapter again explores madera, along with seven other topics: improvisation, soloing, mano y palo, triadic drum concept, drum building, acceleration, religion, and dance, before discussing where modern candombe fits.

Uniting these pan-American musics, again, is the madera. As mentioned previously, madera in Uruguay only exists in 3-2. However, this is not true for many other Latin countries who use the 2-3 setting, sometimes even more often. Puerto Rico is a great example of 2-3 heavy music. For example, a classic Cha-Cha-Chá *Oye Como Va* by Tito Puente is in 2-3 during the entire piece.[51] As a staple of American Salsa, it has influenced the 2000's generation of musicians, likely influencing Marc Anthony's 2013 *Vivir Mi Vida*, which is also set in 2-3.[52] As for older music, even the classic bolero *Piel Canela* by Sonora Matancera is in 2-3 the entire time.[53]

This 2-3 heavy culture stands out when considering that one would be hard-pressed to find Uruguayan music in 2-3. The explicit playing of clave seems to be common in Candombe

[51] Puente, Tito. *Oye Como Va*. LP. Tico Records, 1962.

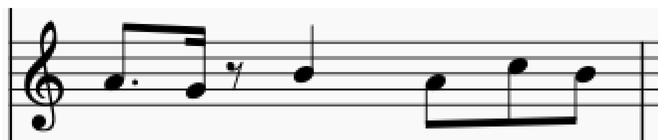
[52] Anthony, Marc. *Vivir Mi Vida*. CD. Vol. 3.0. Sony Latin, 2013.

[53] Sonora Matancera. *Piel Canela*. LP. Vol. Sonora Matancera's Parade Of Stars. Seeco Records, 1957.

and Africa, unlike some other Latin American musics in which madera is implied. Take, for example, the recording *Solo Se Trata de Vivi*r by candombero Ruben "el negro" Rada, who is probably Uruguays' most prominent candombero and percussionist. Interestingly, this piece does not just use a 3-2 clave, but even heavily outlines it with the bass. The bass player in *Solo se Trata de Vivir* is outlining chords on the 3 side of the clave and resting on the second, less important, half of the measure. Notice how the 3 side of the clave is given emphasis by the bass *tumbao*, or pattern.

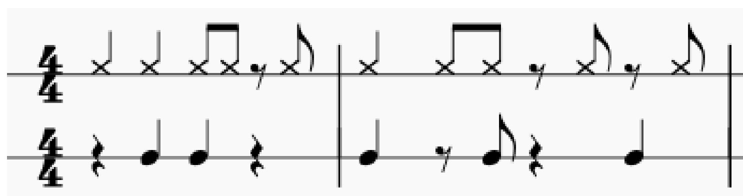
Example 10. Transcription of the bass part in *Solo Se Trata de Vivir.*

In yet another piece by Ruben Rada, *Ayer te Vi,* the 3-2 clave is unmissable. The entire band at one point outlines it in unison as the melody.



Example 11. Transcription of melody from *Ayer te Vi.*

This is very distinct from how madera is used in *Oye Como Va, Vivir Mi Vida,* or *Piel Canela.* It actually can be quite hard to distinguish what the madera setting is in songs like *Piel Canela,* where it is just implied. This may seem counterintuitive– the idea that clave is the essential temporal organization of the music, yet not prominently played in it. However, there really is no need for clave to be explicitly present in the music because it is just an underlying pattern to organize it, like how western art music can be organized with quarter note beats. Oftentimes, the practiced musician can distinguish the clave because they "just know" how it feels and have reached a point of not needing to think about it. Thankfully, there are clues that can be used to find which side of the clave most Afro-Latin music is in. Repeating patterns in the rhythm section can give away the setting of the piece; for example, the timbale pattern has one half that always plays with the 3 side of the clave and one half that always plays with the 2 side of the clave. Musicians or listeners can deduce how the rhythm correlates to the clave and can use this timbale pattern to infer where the clave is. Similarly, in candombe, we discussed how the piano drum has one pattern for the 3 side and one pattern for the 2 side of the madera.



Example 12. Timbale cascara rhythm (top) in comparison to clave (bottom).

Most universally among the band's orchestration, there is more likely to be heavy syncopation on the 3 side of the clave, since it is accordingly the more syncopated pattern of organization. So, if the more syncopated measures come first in the phrase, then the 3 side of the clave is likely coming first. Other clues can come from listening to some conga variations, piano montunos, certain cowbell patterns, or the overall feel of the measures. Musicians with experience can hear these subtle hints in the feel of the music and respond to them accordingly by using patterns and rhythms that fit within the clave.

Meanwhile, the aforementioned Kakatsitsi Master Drummers use madera on the opposite end of the spectrum: explicitly played the entire performance. There are other Afro-Latin musics with an explicit madera– guaguanco, for example, has a clave that plays the duration of the piece. Uruguayan music uses madera in a more intermediary way, with the madera being explicit in some sections, such as the beginning, and implied in others.

Besides madera, candombe is not alone in multiple other practices used to play hand drums. The shared history of Afro-Latinos means that playing techniques such as improvisation, mano y palo, and soloing have carried over from Africa. Exploring these three techniques, which are more studied in other Latin countries, can help to better understand their manifestation in candombe.

Second in importance only to madera, an aspect of African music that has become essential to Latin drumming is improvisation. In fact, much of Latin percussion music– even sheet music– isn't notated, leaving it up to the player to decide what patterns and fills to play. To really demonstrate this, one can see a Western notated segment of Latin drumming music. Notice the following sheet music excerpt from *Oye Como Va;* the slash marks signify to keep

time; this allows the percussionist to improvise whatever rhythms they desire, as long as it fits into the style and clave of the music.

Example 13. Excerpt from *Oye Come Va* by Tito Puente.

The first eight measure phrase of section A is completely improvised. No hits or patterns are given or even suggested for the percussionist, who is free to improvise. Continuing a study of *Oye Como Va,* the original recording features conga player Juan "Papi" Cadavieco, who decided– in his method of improvising– to play variations on this pattern.[54]

Example 14. Conga transcription from *Oye Como Va*.

[54] Puente, Tito. *Oye Como Va*. LP. Tico Records, 1962.

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For practitioners of the music, it is common practice to play what the masters themselves played, meaning they often would play something similar to what Papi played; however, the freedom expressed in the notation of the music demonstrates the musicians the ability to improvise throughout the music– playing whatever pattern the musician seems fit. *Oye Como Va* is a great example of this improvisation, but it is certainly not unique. Most drumming in Latin America is executed as an improvisation that fits within predetermined standards, rhythmic patterns, and musical form.

This expectation for improvisation gives way to masterful soloing. Soloing in much Latin music refers more so to playing unique parts, rather than what would be a classically defined solo– in other words, it is not meant to be heard as a solo, but rather as variations which keep the music interesting. In candombe, the repique drummer is the soloist. The drum plays unique parts that are not found anywhere else in the ensemble; therefore, two repique performances, even of the same song, will always sound different, but the same can be said for Afro-Latin music in general. Each piece is created new by the rellenos that every musician adds.

Throughout Latin America, the purpose of soloing is not to demonstrate virtuosity; rather it is to enhance the dancing and provide variation to the music. Of course, there are sections of music where a musician may be given a set-apart section to demonstrate virtuosity on the drum. However, most of the soloing taking place in Latin Music involves the soloist functioning within the group, not above or outside of it. The musician has to know the other parts being played and how the parts they play will enhance the music and fit into the madera.

Fascinatingly, this three-drum, solo-based playing is also found in folkloric Cuban music, one being guaguanco. Guaguango has three barrel-shaped membranophones: the quinto, conga, and tumba. The conga and tumba play a predetermined rhythm which creates the recognizable

"el-gua-gua-nco" melody of the music. However, the quinto does not have a typical rhythm; it just solos the entire time (again solo as in improvising unique parts). This is in interesting contrast to the repique who does get to solo but is still confined to a basic rhythmic idea. It would be valuable to research why the quinto drum does not have a skeleton rhythm. The quinto can theoretically play anything it desires. Still, it is expected to fit within the music; for example, during a vocally important part of the piece, the quinto would back off the soloing and, just like a repique player might, would play less in order for the other parts to come out.

Another interesting dynamic in Latin America is the use of mano y palo, or the lack there of. The use of drumsticks on hand drums is not universal in Latin America. Middle schoolers in the United States are scolded for using drumsticks on congas or djembes. This is largely because the skin needs to be protected, as the skin on a conga or djembe is much thinner than that on a candombe drum. However, there are still cultures where sticks are used on the skin.

The tambora, found in many Latin cultures, is an example of a drum that is played with mano y palo. Tambora is interesting because the drumstick is just as essential to the playing of this instrument as the hands are. Similar to candombe, one hand plays the stick the entire time and one hand plays the head the entire time. The stick plays on the head and on the rim. Playing on the rim functions similarly to playing on the wood in candombe; however, the tambora is aligned horizontally, so the player has less access to the drum body than a candombero would, therefore can play on the rim more ergonomically.

Another point of similarity throughout Latin America is the use of multiple drums to create one interlocking pattern; this is not unique to Uruguay and Africa– is a common trait throughout the diaspora. Like Uruguay, there are other countries which specifically use three drums The guaguanco was previously mentioned, but the Yoruba/Cuban *Batá* drums and the

Dominican *palos* are also great examples of this interlocking music. Batá drums are used prominently in Cuba– these are hourglass-shaped, double-headed drums. Historically used in Santeria, a syncretic Yoruba/Catholic religion, they share a religious root with candombe. The three drums are the *oconcolo, itotele*, and *iyá*. The iyá, the largest of the drums, is in charge of improvising– similar to the repique. Functioning like the chico drum, the oconcolo is also the first drum a musician learns because this is the drum that sets the time for everything that comes after; it has multiple possible toques but it generally keeps a steady beat going.

Another triadic drum make-up is found in the Dominican palo (or *atabales*). *El tambor mayor,* as the name implies, is the largest of the three drums; it is also the lead drum of the ensemble. El tambor mayor is usually accompanied by *el palo mayor,* and *el tambor más pequeño.* It should be noted, however, that palo music varies from region to region, sometimes being accompanied with different numbers of drums, and sometimes auxiliary percussion. Mostly, these community celebrations also just depend on who– and thus which instruments– are available to play. The same can be said for candombe, although candombe is firm in that it must have at least one of each drum to be considered a full cuerda. Taking over for the pianos' role, this palo cuerda also has a llamada, in which el tambor mayor calls the other drums into playing. Other Latin musics share this element: Cuba with the conga, timbales, bongo make-up; the Dominican panderetas; Puerto Rico with Los Barríles de Bomba and with their Pleneras; and Panama with Tamborito music, to name a few.

Again, among Latin America, we can study drum building as a way to highlight the shared histories of these nations. Uruguay Candombe drums have the shape that they do because they were originally made from *yerba maté* (pronounced SHER-bah MAH-teh) barrels.[55] This is

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[55] UNESCO, *Nomination for inscription on the Representative List in 2009*

because throughout Latin America, the people were making instruments out of the supplies available to them, and maté is massively available in Uruguay. Yerba is a tea which Uruguayans carry with them and drink throughout the day; it is the center of social gatherings, where friends join to *matéar* and families drink it to pass time.[56]

Candombe barrels uniquely honor the culture of Uruguay and the resilience of enslaved Uruguayans, but many drums in Latin America also tell their own people's history. Steel drums from Trinidad are also well known as being a remnant of the countries' export; oil refineries in the island created a waste of 55-gallon oil barrels. Black musicians took these commonly found oil barrels and hammered the metal into bulges that can be tuned to pitches, thus creating an instrument. In a similar fashion, the previously mentioned Dominican Tambora is a two-headed barrel drum which has manifested into many variations; this is because enslaved people had different materials to work with when creating their drums. Some tamboras developed to be tuned with rope while some use bolts for tuning, furthermore, the head material of the tamboras vary greatly and were made of rum barrels, giving the tambora its smaller lap-size. Again, rum barrels were commonly found by enslaved Dominicans because the Dominican Republic is known for producing rum, as large amount of molasses were discovered in the Caribbean.[57] In a different course, the popular Quijada, which many Latin countries share, is an example of Latin Americans making instruments with natural material they found around them– it is just a jawbone from a donkey, horse, or mule, which makes a rattling sound when struck. There is also the cajon, found in multiple Latin Cultures, which is just a wooden box.

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[56] Maté is also drunk in Argentina as a pastime but in Uruguay as an all-day drink.

[57] Smith, Frederick H. *Caribbean Rum: A Social and Economic History*. University Press of Florida, 2008.

Uruguay shares a theme with the rest of Latin America in that enslaved or impoverished people did not have access to specialty materials, and just made instruments out of the material available to them. This created a pattern in which Black Latinos ended up with more makeshift instruments, resembling the instruments they knew from Africa but in refashioned ways.

As previously mentioned, there is a natural, unstandardized increase in speed during many candombe performances.[58] An example of this can be found in a YouTube-uploaded performance by candombero Juan Romero.[59] In his video "Examenskonsert Candombe 2014", he begins his madera at approximately 83 bpm. Halfway through the performance, the speed has already been bumped up to 113 bpm, depending on exactly where one measures, but by the end, however, it is over 120 bpm. Another good example of this is a studio recording by a YouTube channel named "Miguelito Angelito Laureiro Barrios".[60] The video does not contain much information about the recording session or the musicians involved. Still, the beginning of the video is roughly at 96 bpm and ends up somewhere around 118 bpm.

In personal communication with Dr. Joseph Galvin from the University of Indiana, he explained that this tendency to speed up is also essential in Folkloric Cuban Rumba, serving the purpose of increasing energy as the piece develops. His documentary *Los Bandos: Rumba en Cazuela* demonstrates this phenomenon with a very clear change in tempo. A performance in the documentary by Montunos Matanceros begins at 104 bpm and ends at over 130 bpm. This brief survey of the music demonstrates the tendency for these musics to speed up, which feels natural

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[58] Spiro, Michael. *The Congs Drummer's Guidebook*. Petaluma, CA: Sher Music Company, 2006.

[59] Juan Romero Percussion. *Examenskonsert Candombe 2014*, 2014.

[60] Laureiro Barrios, Miguelito Angelito. *Candombe Uruguay*, 2017.

in the music. As the music gets louder and more complex, as more voices join and the dancing energizes, the music naturally feels like it should get faster. It is a way to move the listener and the participant through a story.

The mention of folkloric Cuban music brings up a very important point– Afro-Latin music has a religious beginning. Even though this folkloric art has become commercial, it has a start in the religious practices of enslaved Africans. Much of the music of Latin America is rooted in the folk music of the people; however, when this music became urbanized and commercialized, the participants lost its religion.[61] The tangós and rumbas that were practiced by poor Blacks in worship are kinfolk to the music found in commercial concert halls and studio sessions.

This is not true of only Uruguay; candombe's next-door neighbor is Samba, which experienced a very similar secularization, because samba is derived from the Candomblé religion of the Yoruba people. It is likely that candombe is in some way a linguistic derivative from Brazilian Candomblé; this is an extremely common point of confusion, but many of the specifics there are lost to history. Ruben Rada explains the "little issue" that candomberos have with candomblé by asserting that the two have nothing in common, as candombe is festive while candomblé music is religious, and candombe is in four four time while candomblé is in a type of triple meter.[62] Regardless, candomblé led to samba, which is a secular and festive music.

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[61] Brill, Mark. *Music of Latin America and the Caribbean*. Routledge, 2017.

[62] Canal Encuentro. *Rubén Rada: Candombe y Candomblé*, 2018.

Both samba and candombe are derivatives of the Bantu cycle of macumba.[63] Similar to the word "candombe", the early usage of the word "samba" referred to Black dances set to drums, but now is also considered secular. For example, one secularization that occurred in samba is that the original candomblé lyrics were sung in Yoruba; however, today, samba lyrics are in the vernacular Portuguese.[64]

A vital aspect of this religiosity, which this thesis has only implied, is dance. Although dance is not in the musicological scope of this study, these dances are of musical importance because the drummers play in a way that mimics and interplays with the steps being taken. Moreso, dance should be acknowledged for its ubiquitous importance in the early religious ceremonies of this music, but also in their presence today. One would be hard pressed to find an Afro-Latin dance which is not connected to a religious dance. In fact, even the dance of the mama vieja, central to candombe, is replicated in other Latin American Cultures; rumba dances, which also pantomime African ceremonies, include a mama'buela (mamma-granny) who is being courted by a male.[65]

Modern tango, a dance genre invented along the Uruguay-Argentina border and popularized in post-World War I Paris, is also a neighbor of candombe that was produced from secularization. Erroneously thought of as a white dance, tango has roots in the aforementioned black tangós or dances. Enslaved and free Uruguayans, many on both sides having been skilled

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[63] Trigo, Abril. "Candombe and the Reterritorialization of Culture." *Callaloo* 16, no. 3 (June 22, 1993): 716, 717.

[64] Browning, Barbara. *Samba: Resistance in Motion*. Indiana University Press, 1995, 27.

[65] *Various, Dr. Olavo Alén Rodriguez - From Afrocuban Music To Salsa*. Accessed March 31, 2022.

and educated instrumentalists, would gather, and play and even engage in rivalries between the drummers and instrumentalists.[66] In those gatherings, tango emerged and inspired Carlos Gardel, a father of Tango music. In those early stages, around the 1830's, "tangó", like "samba", referred to the "dramatic dances of African slaves", many being pantomimes of the same religious ceremonies that candombe was.[67] These three Southern Cone musics stem from a religious purpose and became popular music.

However, that tension of religion still exists, and the mixing of religious and secular has troublesome manifestations in modern candombe. These Latin musics live in Catholic-influenced countries; that history has attached the stigma of witchcraft, magic, and santeria to Latin percussion music. In fact, even indigenous musics face these issues. Despite being secular and commercial art form, candombe, reggaeton, salsa and others are commonly associated with magic. In fact, even in my own family, candombe is thought of as a witchcraft music. Stereotyped as being superstitious, many Hispanic percussionists are aware of the religious history of these musics and tread lightly in these matters. This caution comes from an idea which some Brazilians might recognize as *axé,* Robert Ferris Johnson translates as the power-to-make-things-happen, that even though the dances and music are secular they still have still have the potential to invite entities.[68] Take the previous example of samba and candomblé. Samba still has dance moves and practices which mimic religious ones.[69] This idea might seem difficult to

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[66] Montevideo Music Group, *Rubén Rada - Tango Milonga y Candombe (En Vivo)*.

[67] Ayestarán, Lauro. *El Folklore Musical Uruguayo*. Vol. 28. Bolsiliros Arca. Arca, 1967, 162.

[68] Thompson, Robert Farris. *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*. Vintage Books, 1984, 5.

[69] Thompson, Robert Farris. *Flash of the Spirit*, 28.

grasp, but modern Christianity also has this idea that religious iconographies or messages have spiritual potential, even in secular environments.

Because of this belief, Afro-Latin musics are often ridiculed or given the burden to defend themselves. However, the images are there, even in modern music. Salseros Marc Anthony and Willie Colón/Héctor Lavoe each have a song titled Aguanile. Aguanile is a Santeria term which references the Yoruba idea of a spiritual cleansing.[70] In essence, these songs by Marc Anthony and Willie Colón could be said to have axe of the Yoruba religion, causing some tension between the culturally Catholic communities and the Black communities of Latin America.

Finally, these Latin musics are already so blended that they create a natural entryway for new music to affect them. Candombe, like so much of Latin music, has been greatly influenced by Jazz. The typical candombe cuerda does not include vocals. In fact, the entire 2022 desfile of Las Llamadas can be found on YouTube, with not a single vocal performance present.[71]

Taking in mind all these points, Uruguay can be understood in the context of other Afro-Latin musics. Although it is unique and historically distinguished, the music of Uruguay has shared concepts with the music of Afro-Latinos throughout the Americas.

Although it looks like the idea of madera and the concept of African heritage are unchanging in Uruguay, the same cannot be said for candombe as a whole. Just like other diasporic styles, jazz has had a tremendous influence on the music of Uruguay. The discussed

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[70] Naroditskaya, Inna. *Music in the American Diasporic Wedding*. Indiana University Press, 2019, 75.

[71] CANAL 4. *Desfile de Llamadas 2022*, 2022.

videos by Juan Romero Percussion and Miguelito Angelito Laureiro Barrios contain no singing; however, the pieces by Ruben Rada do, an element that comes from vocal jazz. Modern candombe musicians like Diego Janssen have worked to create a candombe jazz fusion which is very popular in Uruguay. Janssens album *El Hijo De* won two Uruguayan National Music Awards and has been called one of Uruguay's greatest albums.[72]

Latin Jazz fusion has been happening in the United States even before Mario Bauzá's 1940s Tangá.[73] Considered the first Latin Jazz tune, it contained the instrumental, harmonic, and improvisational elements of jazz, but written "en clave". Thus, the melody and improvisations had to fit within that temporal organization, rather than swing. Now, any Afro-Cuban band will include saxophones, trombones, and piano– all jazz elements. Brazilian Bossa Nova, too, has taken folkloric Brazilian styles and merged them with jazz elements, giving today's popular Candombe its instrumentation and complicated harmonies.

Conclusion

Although candombe shares so many similarities with West Central Africa and the rest of Latin America, it is still a very unique art form. One feature that does make candombe stand apart from other modern Latin genres is the influence that milonga and tango have had on it. Milonga is a dance genre which originated in the Rio De La Plata, only containing the 3 side of the madera, thus creating a 3-3-2 feel. It is often confused with Tango, due to their similarities in sound and dance. In listening to Ruben Rada, one can hear the minor melodies and the chromaticism that are characteristic of tango and milonga. It is not rare to hear a happy

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[72] Alencr Pinto, Guilherme de. "Raspa, Pega y Enciende." Brecha Digital. Accessed March 23, 2022.

[73] Mario Bauzá and and His Afro Cubans. *Tangá*. Messidor, 1992.

candombe still in a minor melody. Rada's 2014 album *Tango, Milonga, & Candombe* switches between the three genres seamlessly, including the rhythmic groupings of tango and milonga and introducing the drums of candombe playing softly in the background of tango's guitar and accordion ensemble.[74] A big difference between the Las Llamadas and this new Milonga/Tango Candombe is the style in which the drums are being played. They play in a very reserved manner compared to that of carnaval comparsas, similar to how Bossa Nova drum set plays in contrast to Samba comparsas. Notably, too, the mama vieja and gramillero are present in the entire performance.

Traditional candombe is actually what gave way to modern tango, which developed and in turn influenced modern candombe. However, tango and milonga, which does have a rhythmic and harmonic basis in candombe, can also be found to have direct rhythms from candombe. Uruguayan Alfredo Zitarrosa, one of the most famous names in milonga, has a 1968 song in which he puts candombe rhythms on the resonating chambers of his guitar ensemble.

As with much modern music, this modern version of candombe stirs up conversation. Uruguayan composer Eduardo Da Luz says in his Rioplatense Spanish "every time, new melodies appear: other formats, other liabilities. . . because, before, candombe was the drum, the mama vieja, and the dance, today suddenly, there are themes that don't even mention the drum. There are candombes that sing love, that sing to the flower, that sing to life." He is referring to what Uruguayan historian Óscar Montaño clarifies is not evolution, but transformation. Da Luz continues ". . .and maybe now candombe is looking for another pathway. Which is good, or better said, it means that candombe isn't in decline."

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[74] Montevideo Music Group, *Rubén Rada - Tango Milonga y Candombe (En Vivo).*

Candombe joined the popular music scene in the 1930s; before then it was just seen as the folk expression of a marginalized group.[75] Since then, candombe has become so natural that musicians will say they sing a candombe when it is really a tango, like Alfredo Zitarrosas Candombe del Olvido, or will title a piece with "tango" when it is fused with candombe rhythms. Many fusions of candombe emerged, including candombe beat, a 1960s pop fusion led by Eduardo Mateo. Most importantly, the candombe itself, has changed between the first comparsa (la Raza Africana) was created in 1865 to the most recent Las Llamadas in 2022. [76]

However, this transformation and innovation is not without its criticism. "Innovation? What innovation? No. It's a disrespect, not an innovation at all" to quote Barrio Sur musician Fernando "Hurón" Silva, who claims the new drum breaks were put in because the candomberos couldn't handle the marching and wanted a break from walking. He refers to drum breaks where cuerdas will add in rhythms or grooves that aren't traditional. Traditionalists say it's there in order to appease the audience and keep people interested, and this new funk-pop-jazz-milonga-tango fusion that Ruben Rada has pioneered seems to many as if it is catering to the masses. In reference to this commercial candombe, candombero Benjamín "Chiquito" Arrascaeta says "it affects [candombe] in the sense that it makes [candombe] into the commercial form that deforms it.", and many place the carnaval at the center of it; candombero Juan Gularte: warns "and you all be careful with the carnaval. It's deforming what is the playing of the drum. It's more worried about the colors the feathers, the shine, the clothing, the quantity, and they are leaving off to the

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[75] Picun, Olga. "El Candombe y la Música Popular Uruguaya." *Perspectiva Interdisciplinaria de Música* 0, no. 01 (April 30, 2010).

[76] "Candombe Music | Discogs." Accessed March 23, 2022.

side the essence. . . we are in a crisis of Candombe. Because they are distorting it they are adulterating it, with luxuries and not with essence”.

Still, many people see the changes as the life force in candombe. Certainly, the candombe that traditionalists play is not the candombe that was played by post-emancipation musicians. Maybe this is why the definition of candombe is so intangible: is it the rhythms that make candombe, or is it something more? Is it the mama vieja, the drums, the dance? Regardless, the history of candombe is what unites these different aspects together. Hence, my initial claim that candombe is a history. But with a relatable story of enslavement and native oppression, why is Uruguay so often excluded from these conversations about Afro-Latin music?

Likely, a contributing factor is distance. As I mentioned earlier, the United States has functioned as a hub for Latin music. It is no wonder that the most popular Latin music in the United States is Caribbean and Mexican. This correlates to the high number of Caribbean and Mexican Americans, with likely 80.8% of American Latinos being Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban and Dominican. Therefore, the Afro-Latin music that is most often promoted is that of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic. While the music of more geographically distant Afro-Latin musics, such as Panama or Ecuador get less promotion in the American music market, which has global influence.

Still, this doesn’t account for the popularity of Brazilian Bossa Nova and Samba. Thus, another contributing factor is likely just size. As mentioned, Uruguay is a small country. Not only is Uruguay physically small, the population is also small. Cambodia, which has the exact same land mass as Uruguay, has a population of over 16 million people, while Uruguay has not even four million. With a population size that small, and a very isolationist political stance, it's

much less likely to cast a large influence on the musical scene of the United States, and recordings coming out of Uruguay are mostly contained to the Rio de la Plata area.

Sadly, however, are those years of whitewashing and marketing that Uruguay undertook to paint itself as "the Sweden of the South", undermining and masking Afro-Uruguayans. Uruguay intentionally created an image for itself as White and European, with even school textbooks crediting European immigrants as the founders of the "uniquely democratic" country, thus excluding itself from conversations about the African diaspora.[77] After so many years of masking its African culture, promoting it now, when the Black population is even lower than in the early years of the nation, is going to be a reach. However, to really understand the racial construction and interplay of Uruguayan society, one has to be present and immersed.

Field research in Uruguay could explore how race practically functions in candombe's rhythms and madera. To what extent do Uruguayans think of themselves as a descendant of the African diaspora? Do Uruguayans at large even concern themselves with candombe outside of the carnaval season? It's likely that this demonstration of how candombe fits with African music is only documentation of what candomberos already knew.

Still, this research will hopefully begin a shift in the way Uruguayan art is conceptualized by both the musicologist and the Latin musician: as music which belongs to a greater story of Africanness in Latin America, not just a product of commercial festivity. Tango and milonga, too, can hopefully be conceptualized as a product of African influence, rather than a White music.

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[77] Andrews, George Reid. *Blackness in the White Nation: A History of Afro-Uruguay*. University of North Carolina Press, 2010, 3.

Nevertheless, candombe in the neighborhoods will continue, probably untroubled with how scholars are defining it. Despite these new and difficult conversations about definitions, exclusion, profit, rhythmic transformations, and race relations, and despite the reminiscent traditionalists and the opportunistic profiters, the comparsas will remain a society for Blacks and lubolos. As long as Facebook posts promote Sunday afternoon cuerdas and Uruguayan kids see the Mama Vieja's dance, the candombe will play.

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