Representation and Difference: Racialisation in Marimba Esmeraldeña and Bomba del Chota[1]

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Abstract

During the Atlantic slavery period enslaved and freed Africans and Afro-descendants populated principally two areas in Ecuador: the Chota-Mira valley (Imbabura and Carchi provinces) and the northern part of Esmeraldas province. Afrodescendants from these territories created two music and dance-based events; Bomba del Chota and Marimba Esmeraldeña. Since their arrival, Afro-descendants in Ecuador have had a history of dehumanization that continues until the present day. Based on the testimonies of the Marimberos and Bomberos included in this paper, archival compilation and fieldwork research, I address questions of racialized representations of Marimba and Bomba in order to build towards the notion of communicative competence. Here I propose the shift of some of the representations of Marimba and Bomba from the current focus on stereotypical characteristics such as a naturalized happiness and hyper-sexuality, to an emphasis on Afro-Ecuadorians' collective memories. Through a sonic

[1)] This paper and its sonic composition are bas ed on a chapter of my PhD thesis entitled "Sounds of collective memories: A decolonial counter-representation of Afro-Ecuadorian Marimba Esmeraldeña and Bomba del Chota" (López-Yánez, 2020). I dedicate this paper to one of the most renowned, charismatic and wise Afro-Ecuadorian artist, the Marimbero Guillermo Ayoví Erazo -Papá Roncón-, who passed away on September 30th, 2022, while I was writing it.

composition and its theorization, a questioning of coloniality that sustains racialized representations and the exposure of key, but usually silenced, collective memories is proposed. By developing a sonic composition and analyzing it, I aim to contribute with crucial theoretical and practical strategies to deepen a much needed and timely understanding of Marimba and Bomba

Keywords

Afro-Ecuadorian, Communicative competence, Coloniality, Dance, Music.

Resumen

Durante la esclavitud transatlántica, africanos y afrodescendientes esclavizados y cimarrones poblaron principalmente dos áreas del Ecuador: el Valle del Chota-Cuenca del río Mira (provincias de Imbabura y Carchi) y el norte de la provincia de Esmeraldas. Estas personas afrodescendientes crearon dos eventos basados en música y baile; Bomba del Chota y Marimba Esmeraldeña. Desde su llegada, los afrodescendientes en Ecuador han tenido una historia de deshumanización que continúa hasta nuestros días. Con base en los testimonios de los Marimberos y Bomberos incluidos en este artículo, la compilación de archivos y la investigación de campo, abordo representaciones racializadas de Marimba y Bomba para avanzar hacia la noción de competencia comunicativa. Mi objetivo es contribuir al cambio de dichas representaciones desde el enfoque en características estereotipadas como una felicidad naturalizada y una hipersexualidad, a un énfasis en las memorias colectivas de las personas afroecuatorianas. A través de una composición sonora y su teorización, propongo un cuestionamiento de la colonialidad que sustenta representaciones racializadas y la exposición de memorias colectivas clave, pero habitualmente silenciadas. Al desarrollar una composición sonora y analizarla, pretendo contribuir con estrategias teóricas y prácticas cruciales para profundizar una comprensión muy necesaria y oportuna de la Marimba y la Bomba.

Palabras claves

Afroecuatoriano, Competencia comunicativa, Colonialidad, Danza, Música

Introduction

During the Atlantic slavery period (16th to 19th century), enslaved and freed Africans and Afro-descendants populated principally two areas in Ecuador: the Chota-Mira valley (Imbabura and Carchi provinces) and the northern part of Esmeraldas province. Despite the presence of Afro-Ecuadorians all over the national territory, the two areas that have been historically occupied by Afro-Ecuadorians are the ones considered as "Afro-Ecuadorian ancestral territories". The Afro-Ecuadorian scholar, activist and storyteller Juan García Salazar (2017) defines an Afro-Ecuadorian ancestral territory as a specific geographic area that is under the cultural influence as well as the social and political control of one or more Afro-Ecuadorian communities or neighborhoods that share a history in common (p. 49)[2].

[2] This definition and the rest of quotations and definitions throughout this paper that are taken from sources written in Spanish are my translation

In their first centuries in the country, Afrodescendants from these ancestral territories created two music and dance-based events; Bomba del Chota and Marimba Esmeraldeña.

Because of the violent and racist circumstances of their arrival, these territories, and the people who inhabit them, have been looked down upon by most mestizo people as places of violence, laziness, backwardness, and unconquered nature who own harmless but weird music, dances and other cultural traditions (Rahier, 1998, p. 423, 2011, p. 68). As a result, Afro-Ecuadorians from Esmeraldas and Chota-Mira Valley have always had a history of dehumanization in common that continues until the present day. In this paper, I address questions of racialized representations of Afro-Ecuadorian music and dance-based events of Marimba Esmeraldeña and Bomba del Chota in order to build towards the notion of communicative competence. I aim to contribute to the shift the representations of Marimba and Bomba from the current focus on stereotypical and fixed characteristics such as a naturalized happiness and hyper-sexuality, to an emphasis on the collective memories.

I have been researching Afro-Ecuadorian music and dance-based events since 2008. This allowed me to develop a long-term relationship with some of the Afro-Ecuadorians who are included in this paper such as Juan García Salazar † (Playa de Oro community, Esmeraldas province) and Guillermo Ayoví Erazo *"Papá Roncón"* † (Borbón city, Esmeraldas province). Importantly, this

paper is framed on a bigger research, through which I have extensively talked and learned from Afro-Ecuadorian activists, academics and artists who, although not directly included in this paper, undoubtedly informed the ideas presented here, not just in terms of the collective memories they shared with me with much pride and trust, but also through those knowledges that go beyond what can be transmitted through words, and which were experienced through dancing, playing instruments, laughing, eating, travelling and dreaming together. Some of them are; the Marimberos/as Alberto Castillo Palma, Petita Palma Piñeiros and Larry Preciado Hernández (Esmeraldas city, Esmeraldas province), Catalina Mendez Ortiz Palacios, Maura Manuela Medina Caicedo and José Gabriel "Nacho" Caicedo Ayoví (Telembí community, Esmeraldas province), Numas Ramirez † (San Lorenzo city, Esmeraldas province), Rosa Huila (Borbón city, Esmeraldas province), Walter Jacinto "Jalisco" Gonzales Tenorio † (Quinindé city, Esmeraldas province) ; the Bomberos/as Ezequiel Sevilla (Ponce community, Carchi province), Jesús Torres Minda (Palo Amarillo community, Chota-Mira Valley), Cristobal Barahona (Juncal community, Chota-Mira Valley), "Las Tres Marías" (Gloria, María Magdalena † and Margarita Rosa Helena Mendez, Chalguayacu community, Chota-Mira Valley); María Belermina Congo de Jesús and Segundo Teodoro Mendez de Jesús (community of Tumbatú, Chota-Mira Valley), María Rogelia

Minda and Zoila Espinoza † (community of Chota, Chota-Mira Valley), Plutarco Viveros (community of Mascarilla, Chota-Mira Valley); the academics Gualberto Espinoza (community of Santa Ana, Chota-Mira Valley), Iván Pabón Chalá (community of Piquiucho, Chota-Mira Valley), Juan Montaño Escobar (Esmeraldas city, Esmeraldas province), Pablo Minda (Rocafuerte community, Imbabura province), Paulo Ayala Congo (Quito city, Pichincha province), Diego Palacios Ocles (Juncal Community, Chota-Mira Valley) and Xavier Vera Cooke (Esmeraldas city, Esmeraldas province). Although my relationship with Afro-Ecuadorians Marimberos, Bomberos, activists and academics has been shaped by my privileges as a mid-class mestizo-Ecuadorian, I have tried my best to use my work as a channel to expose the violence Afro-Ecuadorians have historically faced. As has been stated by the Afro-Ecuadorian activist group 'Fundación Azúcar' (2017, p. 7), it is essential not to elude the

responsibility that not just the Ecuadorian state but all Ecuadorians have in repairing the damage of our country's past of Atlantic slavery for Afro-Ecuadorians and to contribute to questioning its acute consequences.

In order to obtain the material for this research, I also reviewed the following archives from 2015 to 2019: 'Archivo Equinoccial de Música Ecuatoriana' (Quito, Ecuador), the 'Fondo Afro' of the UASB, the archives from the 'Radio Antena Libre' in Esmeraldas city, and archives from the 'Universidad Técnica del Norte' in Ibarra city. Important material was also generously donated by the documentarist David Lasso from his personal archives. I also did an exhaustive research of material from YouTube and Facebook (music and interviews) to understand general perceptions of Marimba and Bomba.

Based on the aforementioned archival compilation and fieldwork research, a questioning of coloniality that sustains racialized representations and the privileging of key, but usually silenced, collective memories is proposed here through a sonic composition and its theorization[3].By developing a sonic composition and analyzing it, I aim to contribute with crucial methodological, theoretical and practical strategies to widen and deepen a much needed and timely understanding of Marimba and Bomba, which signals the possibility of working towards the moves beyond fixed stereotypes rooted in coloniality and thus, of including collective memories on their performances.

[3] To learn more about the use of sounds in research of Afro-Ecuadorian culture see López-Yánez (2021).

From coloniality to communicative competence in Marimba Esmeraldeña and Bomba del Chota

Crucial to understanding the process of dehumanization of Afro-descendants in Ecuador through their music and dance-based events is the reflection upon of "coloniality" (Quijano, 1992), and of a "racialized colonial difference" (RCD; Walsh & Mignolo, 2018, pp. 153–158). Specifically, it is suggested that under the lenses of the RCD, Afro-Ecuadorians are represented as not 'hu-

man enough', through their portrayal as a naturally happy and hyper-sexual group of people. Although these characteristics may seem innocent, they are implicitly related to a lack of ability to produce knowledges or to engage to their "collective memories" and thus, to have "communicative competence".

Coloniality and RCD are utilized here as analytic and practical options to challenge, criticize and unmask colonial narratives related to the understanding of the self and the other and focus instead on Afro-Ecuadorians' collective memories. Whereas coloniality is understood as the hierarchical structure of domination that persisted even when the period of colonialism ended (Quijano, 1992), the RCD refers to the location of historically racialized groups such as Afro-descendants into a category of lesser humans in relation to the prototype of white human throughout coloniality (Walsh & Mignolo, 2018, pp. 153–158).

Here it is argued that one of the main characteristics of the RCD is that it does not take into account the dynamic relation of Marimberos and Bomberos' to their collective memories. García and Walsh (2017) affirm that collective memories are "the group of philosophies and teachings that come from the elders" (p. 181). They are also "…a result of a dynamic and collective production that articulates past and present…" (Walsh, 2002, p. 69). It is important to question and disobey what RCD, through some representations of Marimba and Bomba, has taught people about Afro-Ecuadorians. In order to achieve this, it is fundamental to realize the relation of Marimba and Bomba's representations and Afro-Ecuadorians' collective memories through what has been named as communicative competence.

Drawing on Hall (1997a, 1997b), who argues that a practice of representation is the embodying of concepts, ideas and emotions in a symbolic form which can be transmitted and meaningfully interpreted, I wish to affirm that all events of Marimba Esmeraldeña and Bomba del Chota are systems of representation that construct specific meanings and thus, express specific knowledge. These meanings are continually being generated and interpreted. As Hall (1997b) suggested, the importance of understanding the meanings portrayed in each practice of representation lies in the fact that it is meaning that helps to set rules, norms and conventions by which social life is ordered and

governed (p. 3). Moreover, meanings mobilize powerful feelings and emotions, define what is normal, who belongs, and therefore, who and what is excluded (Hall, 1997b, p. 10).

During conversations I held with a good number of Marimberos and Bomberos over the course of the years, I have noticed that they made a clear distinction between those Marimberos and Bomberos who expressed knowledges that were limited to playing or dancing Marimba or Bomba and those who expressed knowledges that went beyond the performance of sounds and movements. This second group of Marimberos and Bomberos were acknowledged as being also connected to what has been named here as collective memories that go beyond sound and movement systems. Based on these conversations, I suggest that the Marimberos and Bomberos' relation to collective memories beyond sound and movement system can be expressed in some events of Marimba and Bomba through what the North American ethnochoreologist Adrianne Kaeppler (2000, 2001, 2002) has named as communicative competence.

Communicative competence refers to the expression of those collective memories that include but go beyond a tradition of sound and movement. These collective memories have to do with the cognitive learning of the shared rules of a specific tradition of sound and movement (Kaeppler, 2002, p. 15) or with specific experiences that have historically shaped the events of Marimba or Bomba. Therefore, it is expected that not all collective memories of Marimba and Bomba would be transmitted while singing and dancing, but also while, for instance, being immersed in Afro-Ecuadorian Marimba and Bomba events and when listening to the retelling of past experiences -collective memories- among Afro-Ecuadorians' families and friends. It is within the deep understanding of collective memories and in the ability and choice to express them (verbally or not) that communicative competence is located.

Essential for this paper, I affirm that, some representations of Marimba and Bomba do not include communicative competence. This means that they do not express collective memories beyond the performance of a sound and movement system. What is more, many events of Marimba and Bomba are limited, above all, to a system of movements and sounds. Frequently,

these movements and sounds are related to a social construct of Marimberos and Bomberos as hyper-sexual and 'naturally' happy and thus, communicate the meanings generated through a racialized colonial difference[4]. The relation of these performances of Marimba and Bomba to a racialized colonial difference makes them part of what Hall has called a "racialized regime of representations" (Hall, 1997a, p. 232). RCD in Marimba and Bomba's representations can be better understood by following what was stated by Mignolo (in Walsh & Mignolo, 2018) in relation to some museums; "they could only collect artefacts representative of 'other' memories but not the memories contained in those artefacts, removed and displaced from their cultural environment, their owners, their authors" (p. 199).

The stereotypical beliefs about Afro-Ecuadorians are straightforwardly related to laziness, animal-like behaviour and appearance, ugliness, hyper-sexuality and stupidity (Wade, 1974, p. 192). Essentially, these beliefs are negative associations about their intelligence and behavior that have their origin in colonialism and also in the scientific racism that spread throughout Europe in 19th century and that had consequences all over the globe (de la Torre, 2002; Antón, 2009).

On the other hand, as it is shown below, it is clear that Marimberos and Bomberos' collective memories go beyond Marimba's and Bomba's sound and movement system and that almost four hundred years of colonial rule and two hundred years of internal colonialism have not been able to erase.

Sounding coloniality and communicative competence of Marimba Esmeraldeña and Bomba del Chota

Through the sonic composition that is the basis on this paper, I specifically expose and question the notion of a decontextualized and enduring 'happiness' and the constructed relation of 'happy' black in relation to stereotypical belief about them mentioned above. This relation becomes clearer in TV shows, in the street and at stadiums. In its final part, I bring to the fore diverse

[4] The category of Bomba del Chota that is related to RCD has been named by López-Yánez (2022-a) as "Bomba as a spectacle"; whereas the category of Bomba del Chota which is related to collective memories beyond sound and movement and thus, which is believed to have communicative competence, has been named by the same author as "Bomba cimarrona"..

Marimberos and Bomberos' voices as a way of challenging the above-mentioned naturalized characteristics. Please listen to the composition by clicking here or using this QR code.

Exposing racialised representations: the 'naturally happy and hot' Marimba and Bomba.

Historically, Marimba and Bomba have been many times perceived under the lenses of a RCD. For instance, Bomba event was described by Hassaurek (1967/1868) as "characterized by wild sweeping and sashing, and extravagant gesticulations…" (p. 193). As for the musicians of Bomba, Hassaurek affirmed that a drummer of Bomba performed "with the agility of a monkey…" (p. 193). Similarly, Festa (1909) said, "all the instruments [of Bomba] were the most primitive that can be imagined" (p. 303). The same author also mentioned that Bomba was a sort of "wild and barbaric music…" (p. 333). As for the lyrics of the songs of Bomba, Costales and Peñaherrera (1959) describe them as "random words from a conversation with a child - but with a child that has been forced to become a man and thus says unstructured things, without beauty" (p. 205). With regard to Marimba Esmeraldeña, the traveler Basurco (1902) describes it as an "infernal racket" and also mentioned how desperate he felt listening to a Bambuco (one of Marimba's rhythms) and how much he felt Afro-Esmeraldeños needed to learn to play the Marimba 'properly' (p. 64).

In line with these historical testimonies, this paper's sonic composition begins with an emphasis on the racialized meanings that are usually transmitted through some much more recent rep-

resentations of Marimba and Bomba that do not have communicate competence. These songs turn Bomba and Marimba into what Walsh and Mignolo (2018) have referred to as "ahistorical versions of music and dance as a [racialized] colonial difference" (p. 86)[5].

A clear example of these Marimba's and Bomba's ahistorical and colonial versions is the emphasis put by the Afro-Ecuadorian rhythms teacher whose description inaugurates this paper's composition, namely their sole relation to characteristics of happy -"women express their happiness through this rhythm" - and hot -"this rhythm is really hot"- events. Furthermore, the radio broadcaster that is heard immediately after mentions how "black race is naturally good at music". Here it is suggested that a decontextualized notion of an Afro-Ecuadorian 'pure' happiness is a socially accepted code that is usually going to appeal to all types of audience. As de la Torre (2010) has affirmed, there seems to be the assumption that once slavery ended, Afro-Ecuadorians happily stayed on their ancestral territories, singing and dancing in isolated and impoverished communities (p. 36)[6].

As for the supposed hyper-sexualization of black people, as part of colonial difference this belief was utilized by the conquerors during the Atlantic slave trade to re-affirm their own identity relating to a mandatory Judeo-Christian chastity as the ideal of what is right, and the other people's identity as full of 'natural' deviations (Borja Gómez, 1998, pp. 132, 164). Specifically, the supposed hyper-sexualization of black people was used to affirm that the black female of the newly conquered lands was "waiting to be penetrated" by male conquerors (Schick, 1999 in Rahier, 2003, p. 298), therefore justifying the sexual violence that was part of the Atlantic slave trade. Meanwhile, conquerors also generated extreme measures to control Afrodescendants' supposed hyper-sexuality through, for instance, forcing enslaved people to have nuclear families and to marry among each other, as was the case of the Afro-Choteños who were enslaved by the Jesuits, or by prohibiting or monitoring their music and dances which were perceived by the conquerors as the ideal sites for Afro-Ecuadorians' uncontrollable sexual practices, as was the case of Afro-Esmeraldeños.

5) The decontextualization of local knowledges is neither limited to those related to music and dances nor to Ecuador. To see a similar case related to a Colombian music genre, see Birenbaum-Quintero (2006) and about ecological knowledges in Canada, please see L. T. Simpson and Klein (2013)

6) The naturalised relation between Afro-descendants and happiness has also been mentioned by Hall (1997a, p. 245) when he mentions the belief of 'happy natives' as "black entertainers, minstrels and banjo-players who seemed not to have a brain in their head but sang, danced and cracked jokes all day long, to entertain white folks; or the 'tricksters' who were admired for their crafty ways of avoiding hard work..."

Although authors such as Fanon (1986, p. 106) have made it clear that sexual desires or practices are dependent on social and historical circumstances, the belief that black people are 'naturally hyper-sexual' has remained strong until the present day. As Rahier has stated (2011, pp. 60–63), like in many other countries, stereotypes that depict Afro-Ecuadorians' immoral, abnormal, obsessive, irrepressible, permissive and therefore, 'savage' sexuality in relation to a mestizo *'señora' or 'dama'* (lady) are abundant[7]. The created 'hyper-sexualization' of black people can also be observed in the way African and Afro-descendants' music and dances are seen as markedly sexual practices. Wade (2010), in his research on black people in Latin America, affirms that black people's dances have historically been seen as the context within which sexual desires can be reflected in black people's movements while dancing. While studying black people in Colombia, Wade argues that "styles of music and dance associated with black people, or as danced to by black people, are still seen as sexually immoral by many people" (Wade, 2010, p. 110). For instance, among all Ecuadorian music and dances, only Afro-Ecuadorian music and dance include hyper-sexual signifiers such as dancers' clothes and even the music's lyrics. As Walmsley has stated, Esmeraldas and Chota Mira Valley (the two Afro-Ecuadorian ancestral territories) are considered places where people are naturally 'calientes' ('hot') and good at dancing (Walmsley, 2005, p. 184)[8].The notion of people who are calientes is related to party people who are not so good at other activities such as working or thinking. Importantly, some people can also relate the notion of caliente to a supposed hyper-sexuality.

Following the testimonies of Marimba and Bomba belonging to a group of naturally happy people, two songs can be heard. These very popular songs are related to Marimba and Bomba and have taken Bomba and Marimba beyond Afro-Ecuadorian ancestral territories; the first one from the Ecuadorian *Tecnocumbiera* Hipatia Balseca, who has been declared as the *'Diva de la Tecnocumbia'* (Tecnocumbia's Diva)[9]. In this song, with an erotic voice tone characteristic of *Tecnocumbieras*, Balseca repeats over and over phrases exclusively related to the women's hip movement inviting everyone to dance; "and now, let's shake our hips, move your hips, let's dance Bomba… left, right, come on! With rhythm, dance this Bomba

7) To know more about the hyper-sexualization of Afro-Ecuadorian women see Castello (2010) and Hernández (2009)

8) Importantly, hyper-sexualisation clearly has different implications for men than for women, women being the target much more frequently.

9) It is important to mention that the two songs analysed in this paper are fusions that are not part of the "traditional" song that still are, in the case of Bomba, or used to be, in the case of Marimba, danced to in communal celebrations such as marriages, baptisms or saints festivities.

with me, because it is really good, my hip movements drive you crazy…" (NNEcuador, 2012, 01:06-01:26).

The second one is from the artist 'Joel La Clave' who created the successful and widespread Reggaeton song 'Marimba *Perreo*' based on the traditional rhythm of marimba called 'Andarele'. As has been mentioned by Ritter (2011), this song was already a favorite in Esmeraldas during his fieldwork in 2006 (p. 572). Similar to Balseca's Bomba-based Tecnocumbia performance 'La Bomba', this fusion between Marimba and *perreo* focuses on explicit erotic female movements as the trigger point for a celebratory or 'happy' party;

> come and be part of our happiness… with a hand behind, with a raised ass, I want you to move and keep it up, I want to see you here and hot, if you are tired then shake it slower, slower, with Javari and La Clave, softer, cause this ain't gonna finish, this is Marimba, and this is also perreo, shake it with La Clave and you will see the gracefulness, this is Marimba, and also perreo… (X. Ortiz, 2007, 1:54-2:30).

Here I suggest that these two songs reduce Marimba and Bomba to hyper-sexualized and 'happy' performances, excluding the collective memories that have historically been an intrinsic part of them and thus, not allowing the audience to understand and appreciate the different nuances of the collective past from which Marimba and Bomba come.

The stigmatization of Afro-Ecuadorians.

Following the understanding of the meanings related to these Marimba and Bomba's songs, I locate some of them within the on-going process of coloniality. Specifically, these meanings are related to a racialized colonial difference. It is essential to understand how what we learn through these songs has been manipulated and, more importantly, constitutes effective mechanisms for the continued exclusion and stigmatization of Afro-Ecuadorians.

Although an exhaustive investigation of the many evidence of the stigmatization of Afro-Ecuadorians' goes beyond the aim of this paper, it is possible to make sense of some of the most

remarkable examples that reflect the constructed beliefs that have shaped most representations of Afro-Ecuadorians. In this respect, 'being Afro-Ecuadorian' has commonly been related by many Ecuadorians almost exclusively to a homogenous and fixed version of 'ser negro' (being black), which is in turn associated with negative and unchangeable characteristics. Among the most unequivocal evidence of these notions related to Afro-Ecuadorians are the continuation of a racialized colonial difference that has existed since colonial times in the various incidents of racial discrimination in Ecuador. Importantly, these incidents have happened in mass media, and thus, reflect in a much more apparent way the perceptions of most Ecuadorians with regards to blackness.

Among the representations that are considered by most Afro-Ecuadorian activists as the most degrading and stereotypical ones are those that are spread through mass media such as the radio and the television (de la Torre & Hollenstein, 2010, p. 33; STFS et al., 2005, p. 27). Some of these pejorative perceptions have even officially (through a lawyer) or unofficially (in websites such as YouTube or through documentaries) been denounced as 'hate crimes'[10].In the last six years, the government has banned many TV shows in which Afro-Ecuadorians were depicted as lazy, violent and hyper-sexual beings. Importantly, the art. 71 of the Ecuadorian *"Ley Orgánica de Comunicación"* (Organic Communication Law) prohibits the spread of racist or discriminatory content. However, there are still TV shows that include characters depicting Afro-Ecuadorians through blackface and other pejorative characteristics. The most popular pejorative depictions of Afro-Ecuadorians that still exist in public television and radio are the ones that compare Afro-Ecuadorians with animals such as monkeys; highlight Afro-Ecuadorians' apparent lack of ability to think; dirtiness; a 'natural' propensity to be always happy, or to become exclusively either thieves, murderers or soccer players and dancers.

Two of the most complex and telling contemporary examples of representations of Afro-Ecuadorians that are part of a RCD, which can be heard in this paper's composition, are the public commentaries of the Ecuadorian human rights activist and television presenter Giovanny Dupleint in a local talk show in 2010 and the production of a song as part of a political campaign in 'La

10) Acts of racism have been classified in the Ecuadorian Penal Code as 'hate crime' since 2009. According to Antón (2016), hate crimes refer to acts of physical or psychological violence motivated by intolerance, in which the hatred towards someone because of their different nationality or ethnicity is the motivation for a criminal act (pp. 40-41). For information about the first hate crime tried in an Ecuadorian court, see Vera Santos (2021).

Concordia' of the Ecuadorian politician and broadcaster Walter Ocampo in 2009. Although these examples might be thought of as isolated ones, previous studies (Cervone & Rivera, 1999; de la Torre, 2002; de la Torre & Hollenstein, 2010; Handelsman, 2001; Vera Santos, 2016) have shown that they constitute valid evidence of how Afro-Ecuadorians are still perceived and represented in Ecuador. Indeed, although there is a generalized consensus among most intellectuals of 'race' being a social construction that is a product of specific historical contexts, the social understanding of race as a natural, and, thus, a supposedly neutral categorization, still exists.

The first example that is part of this paper's composition occurred during one of the episodes of the popular talk show *'Vamos con Todo'* in 2010. One of the presenters, Giovanny Dupleint, straightforwardly voiced his opinion regarding Afro-Ecuadorians. Dupleint referred to 'los Afroecuatorianos' as lazy, unintelligent and animal-like thieves that were 'only good for selling coconut candies or for being soccer players'. Although Dupleint was not officially accused, a petition through the webpage Change.org organised by the Afro-Ecuadorian Carlos Martín Cabezas (2010) began to circulate in order to encourage people to sign, in order to be able to bring Dupleint to justice at the Federal Judicial Council. Four years later, another statement appeared in the YouTube channel entitled 'Antirracismo en Ecuador' (2014) to protest against Dupleint's appointment as the Director of Human Rights in Ecuador despite his discriminatory comments in previous years.

The second example, which can also be heard in this paper's composition, occurred in La Concordia. 'La Concordia' is the name of an Ecuadorian canton with a population of about thirty thousand inhabitants that is located between the Esmeraldas and Santo Domingo provinces. Its Afro-Ecuadorian population is approximately 8.5% (Ponce, 2006, p. 60). Until 2011, La Concordia was not officially part of either Esmeraldas or Santo Domingo provinces. According to some newspapers, many mestizo inhabitants of the city were against La Concordia becoming part of Esmeraldas province mainly because of Esmeraldas' high Afro-Ecuadorian population and preferred it to become part of Santo Domingo, a province with fewer Afro-Ecuadorians inhab-

[11] Whereas 22.5% of the population of Esmeraldas province is Afro-Ecuadorian, just 2.7% of the population of Santo Domingo province is Afro-Ecuadorian (CODAE, CODENPE, & CODEPMOC, 2010, p. 36).

itants[11].In 2009, a political campaign began to invite La Concordia's inhabitants to a referendum to decide which province the canton should be part of. As part of this campaign, a song entitled 'Negros de mierda' (Shitty blacks) was broadcasted on the radio program 'Super W' owned by Walter Ocampo, the Mayor of La Concordia at that time. The song was composed and released by the Argentinean humor-focused music group 'Jamón de Mar' in 2000 (Melgar Bao, 2005, p. 47). Although in the Argentinean context the phrase 'negros de mierda' refers to rural poor people who migrate to the city to work and that are considered lazy, dirty, thieves and drug addicts, the song was utilized in the aforementioned Ecuadorian political campaign to refer to Afro-Ecuadorians. In the song, which can be heard in this paper's composition, the 'negros' are depicted as dangerous and animal-like beings that should be got rid of.

The broadcasted song 'Negros de Mierda' immediately aroused a wave of protests, especially from Afro-Ecuadorian and Indigenous-Ecuadorian political movements. Despite the evidence that showed that the song was played from his radio station, Ocampo denied responsibility for it and suggested that his political enemies could have infiltrated his radio station. Although it is not clear how many times that song was played on the radio, after two days it was permanently removed. Walter Ocampos was never sanctioned for the reproduction of the song and never gave an official statement about it. Even though the song was not played over the radio for more than a few days, it gained substantial popularity in Ecuador because it was included in a documentary against racism entitled 'Sospechosos' (Suspects; Lasso, 2012). This documentary, whose excerpts are also included in this paper's composition, tackles racism in Ecuador based on a racist incident that happened in the Carolina park of the capital city of Ecuador, Quito, in 2008, where twenty-eight Afrodescendants who were playing soccer, resting or just walking by the park were arrested. In an interview, the chief policemen who led their arrest said they did it because Afro-Ecuadorians 'tend to look suspicious'. The inclusion of the song in this documentary and its straightforward message made it an emblem of the persistent problem of racism in Ecuador.

In 2011, 70% of the population of La Concordia voted for it to be officially part of Santo Domingo province. A year lat-

er, in 2012, the same mayor, Walter Ocampo, who affirmed he had nothing to do with the polemic song, got involved in a new dispute related to the pejorative representations of black people in Ecuador. Ocampo led the construction of a monument in La Concordia's Central Park, which was named 'Monumento a la Raza' (Monument to the Race). The monument depicted three figures of black-skinned women holding a figure of a white-skinned woman standing over a large shell. Once more, a wave of protests arose. In 2013, Ocampo was officially accused of having committed the crime of racial discrimination, to which he replied in an interview that he and his team just wanted to show the unity and strength of 'their' peoples, referring to the inhabitants of La Concordia ("Retirarán monumento 'racista' del Parque Central La Concordia," 2014). Despite these and other arguments in favour of the monument, it was finally removed in a ceremony in 2014, in which La Concordia was declared a territory free of racism.

I argue that both Dupleint's and Ocampos' statements could represent the humiliation and indignity that many Afro-Ecuadorians still face in being considered lesser humans, and thus, being depicted continuously as inferior, ignorant, outdated and 'uncivilized' people. Therefore, in the same way that Mignolo highlighted the relevance of Bruce Gilley's (2017) controversial article in which he asked for the return of colonialism due to its supposed innumerable benefits, for "making public and explicit what is in the mind of many people" (Mignolo in Walsh & Mignolo, 2018, p. 232), I emphasize the significance of these crude examples as a representation of what is still believed by many Ecuadorians.

Challenging coloniality: Voicing Afro-Ecuadorians' communicative competence

Previously, the apparent 'innocent' and 'unimportant' meanings of Bomba and Marimba and their relation to other racist percep-

tions of Afro-Ecuadorians have been exposed through the contextualization of their lyrics and their relation to racialized perceptions in public spaces such as TV and radio. Here and through the final part of this paper's composition, I aim to contrast these pejorative meanings with Afro-Ecuadorians' contesting 'voices' and perceptions around what is assumed about them and how those assumptions affect them. The inclusion of the Afro-Ecuadorians' sonic stance with regards to some representations is a way to introduce the audience to their collective memories. In this regard, an important point to include is that even the most apparently innocent representations that portray racialized beliefs of Afro-Ecuadorians contribute to their permanence in the bottom rung of Ecuadorian society.

It is crucial to understand that the racialized meanings transmitted through Marimba and Bomba have clear and tangible consequences for Afro-Ecuadorian lives. The consequences that were most repeatedly stated by Afro-Ecuadorians with whom I have shared is the difficulties they face when they try to penetrate those spaces that have historically belonged to mestizo people, such as urban spaces[12]. As can be heard in this paper's sonic composition, these difficulties range from being unable to rent a room or an apartment in the main cities -"they tell me they have already rented an apartment because I am black"-, and continually feeling that their presence causes fear among mestizo people -"they get scared when they see me…"- to them being compared to animals and even being catalogued as murderers or dangerous just for being black people -"they say, beware! Blacks are coming!… they change their seat when I am near…" as part of their daily life.

As a result of these racist experiences, black people have continuously raised their voices in protest. As can be heard in this paper's composition, when the police were taking the group of black people to jail in the racist incident that happened in the Carolina park of the capital city in 2008, which is also mentioned above, they did respond; -"… why do you take just blacks!!… If you wanna kill us because we are blacks just do it!!… it can't be possible that they violate our rights because we are black… we are not thieves, we are not criminals!!". As can also be listened to in the composition, even a mestizo woman who was passing by tried to defend them by stating that the policemen were taking them solely because they were black people.

12) For more information about the difficulties Afro-Ecuadorians face in urban cities see de la Torre (2002, pp. 43-46), Fernández Rasines (2001) and Vera Santos (2015).

After the powerful voices of Afro-Ecuadorians protesting against the violation of their humanity, a creative work that challenges racist perspectives against Afro-Ecuadorians is included in this paper's composition. This creative work is the Rap-Bomba song 'I am', written and interpreted by the young academic, communal activist and Bombero Diego Palacios Ocles. Palacios Ocles' song constitutes an example of an artistic product that clearly has communicative competence. This communicative competence is achieved by a variety of resources, ranging from acknowledging his African ancestry, 'I am Yoruba from the Ubuntu, I am Ubuntu from the Bantu'; the horrors of slavery, 'we were victims of a kidnapping'; exposing the still prevalent misconceptions against Afro-Ecuadorians as thieves, animal-like and even people who should be decimated, 'that they have to shoot me like an animal'[13]; to challenging a racist audience, 'they do not know who we are, we have to tell them!'.

Importantly, the central part of the song constitutes a reaffirmation, 'Yo soy' (I am), referring to a sense of belonging to the two Afro-Ecuadorian ancestral territories, 'I am from Coangue (Chota-Mira Valley), I am from the river, I am from the sun… I am from Esmeraldas, and I fight for a dignified life'; their knowledges and spiritual beliefs, 'I am a believer, I am a healer, Orishas take care of me'; and the continuous existence of Bomberos and Marimberos' collective memories, "I brought in my mind my Bomba and my Marimba, I cherish intact my collective memories, my grandparents' stories and even my way of talking, I have African roots, I am Salomón Chalá'[14]. All of these, while playing the Bomba drum with its traditional rhythm and singing the lyrics in a rap mode.

As for the notion of happiness in Marimba and Bomba, which was analyzed sonically and theoretically at the beginning of this paper, one of the first challenges a decolonial work should face when dealing with Afro-Ecuadorian culture is to re-consider the understanding of joy, which is often simplified. As the renowned Afro-Ecuadorian story-teller, historian and activist García Salazar affirmed, "our joy is not simple or banal" (personal communication, 2011). Marimberos and Bomberos with whom I talked confront the idea of happiness being a natural or fixed trait. As it has been discussed in detail elsewhere (López-Yánez, 2022-a,

[13] Palacios Ocles mentioned that the phrase "…that they have to shoot me like an animal…" was improvised when 'Yo soy' was sung prior to an interview about the murder of the 26 years old Afro-Choteño Andrés Martín Padilla Delgado on September 2018. Andrés was unarmed and shot in his back by a policeman during a protest in Chota-Mira. In December 2019, the policeman who shot Andrés was declared innocent under the assumption that he was carrying out his tasks while trying to control the protest. However, Andrés' relatives and Afro-Ecuadorian activists state that the policeman did not need to shoot him because he did not represent a threat. The incident was video-recorded. The sounds of the moment at which Andrés was murdered are included in this paper's sonic composition, right before Palacios Ocles' song, as a way of emphasizing the radical consequences of racism in Ecuador. For more information about Padilla Delgado's murder, see Caiza (2018) and Montaño Escobar (2018).

[14] Salomón Chalá is one of the first Afro-Choteños who, after a lot of hardships, managed to learn to read and write, and became the first teacher of younger generations of Chota-Mira during mid-20th century.

2022-b), Marimberos and Bomberos do acknowledge and cherish the festive and the joyful in performances of Marimba and Bomba and beyond. However, they understand their happiness as an agential and cathartic liberation for a group of people who recognize similar experiences of joy within specific ancestral ways of being in community (collective memories) to 'understand the joke' (communicative competence).

Through their memories of these experiences, Marimberos and Bomberos selectively and strategically reactivate patterns that they have developed in past interactions, providing schema and order to their social universes. This agentic notion of choosing to be joyful is not just connected to past collective memories but also to their ability to improvise and innovate, by making practical and normative decisions between possible alternatives of action in response to emerging demands and dilemmas in present situations. By generating collective spaces of joy, Marimberos and Bomberos perpetuate and renovate history, bringing it to the present and thus transforming it into an ancestral always-existent knowledge. This way of existing through joy has as its ultimate goal the search for psychological and physical freedom.

A sense of freedom is precisely the reason why Marimberos and Bomberos have chosen to generate joyful spaces of Marimba and Bomba for centuries. Moreover, a sense of freedom through joy constitutes a form of autonomous and transformative 'auto-reparación' (self-reparation). As García Salazar affirmed in an interview that is included in this paper' composition: "we had to repair this, but by ourselves, nobody was going to repair us from the pains of slavery, from the wounds of violence, from having been separated from our families, nobody was going to repair it. We needed to repair it ourselves" (Buen Vivir TV, 2016, 21:56-22:18).

This understanding of auto-reparación is especially relevant since one of the reasons why Marimba and Bomba are reduced to happy and hyper-sexual, and by implication superficial events, is because Marimberos and Bomberos' laughter and happiness are believed not to have transcendental qualities. In that sense, Montaño Escobar (2015, para. 3) has referred to 'Afro-Ecuadorians' joy' as an *'alegría combativa'* (combative happiness) to refer to a political attitude with transformative qualities that allowed them to survive

strategically amid structural violence. Similarly, García Salazar's testimony (Buen Vivir TV, 2016), which is included in this paper's composition, explains how an Afro-Ecuadorian woman with whom he talked, explained to him that she always seems happy but not because she is naturally like it but because she has learned to look for happiness in her life. Moreover, García Salazar can be heard affirming that it would be ridiculous to think that Afro-Ecuadorians are naturally happy after all the violence they have historically faced. Furthermore, León Castro (Ranti Ranti, 2016), a renowned Afro-Ecuadorian photographer and academic, can be heard overtly affirming that stating that Afro-Ecuadorians are naturally happy is racist, since their happiness is a construction.

Based on the above-mentioned Afro-Ecuadorians' testimonies, I suggest that the happiness and joy of some representations of Marimba and Bomba have managed to generate practices of re-existence through a transformative and renovating effect among its participants. Moreover, the act of *auto-reparación* is not a social option, but, first and foremost, is a need in order to exist as full and free human beings. Thus, marginalized people continuously fight to become fully human, despite a history that has continuously denied them. This paper's composition continues with another testimony of García Salazar (n.d., Conferencia Negra), who strongly criticizes folk performances of Marimba and Bomba. García Salazar, along with Estupiñán Bass (1981) and Montaño Escobar (personal communication, 2018), have highlighted the fact that the category of folk has reduced Marimba and Bomba into a spectacle with no knowledge of their deep meanings and which has led Marimberos and Bomberos to be exploited and humiliated in exchange for *"unos cuantos centavos"* (a few pennies; García Salazar, n.d., Conferencia Negra, 24:54). In the final part, the Afro-Ecuadorian female teacher Inés Morales Lastra sings her wish for new generations to learn their own history, which is usually not taught. This last testimony works as a powerful reminder of the relevance of including Marimba's and Bomba's history (collective memories beyond its sound and movement system) within public representations.

Through the introduction of some Marimberos and Bomberos' ideas of happiness, a reinterpretation of it is proposed. This reinterpretation constitutes an opening up for the collective

memories of the Marimberos and Bomberos with whom I talked after the understanding of some representations of Marimba and Bomba as part of a racialized colonial difference that has concrete consequences in the life of Afro-Ecuadorians.

Final remarks

This paper had as its main aim to demystify representations of Marimba and Bomba as innocent and non-racialized 'happy performances' by demonstrating instead that they are still very much contributing to the on-going process of coloniality through a racialized colonial difference. Furthermore, an analysis of the most emblematic examples of racism in the last decades in Ecuador and their relation to the racialized meanings performed in some representations of Marimba and Bomba has been presented. These colonial representations have historically perceived everything related to Afro-Ecuadorians, including Marimba and Bomba, through the lenses of a racialized colonial difference.

As an essential part of this paper, the 'voices' of some Afro-Ecuadorians were highlighted. That is, voices of people who, on the one hand, contest racialized and a-historical representations of their music and dance-based events and position themselves as part of a specific historical context of violence and resistance beyond those events' sound and movement system. Among other things, they explained their own understanding of happiness. Through their voices, this group of Afro-Ecuadorians made it evident that a potential liberation from racialized representations is possible, that is to say, a liberation imagined, recreated and defined collectively.

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