

## **Interrogating Identity While Taking Up Space: Art Activism in a Cuban Community**

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### **Interactive Paper Presentation**

#### **Text**

This narrative research explores how an intersectional sub-group of Afro-Cuban art activists understand their intersectional identity in connection with coalition-building through activism. Through facilitated co-analysis, workshop participants will move beyond the circumscriptions of identity politics to explore how these individuals reconcile each of their intersectional identities in the form of coalitions to activate social change. This study presents the perspective of Afro-Cubans currently residing in Cuba and their lived experiences with racism. Literature exists about the racialized experiences of Afro-Cubans, but typically centers the pre- and post-colonial eras of sociopolitical development, focusing on visibility within a dominant national identity. Yet, it is impossible to apply one universal truth to Afro-Cubans who embrace their Blackness alongside their Latinx identity.

Critical Race Theory's (CRT) counter-storytelling tenet applied as a method, informed by narrative inquiry. Though, seemingly, amalgamous in nature, it is a methodology no less valid and informed, though intended to subvert traditional notions of what is ontologically revered. CRT as a theoretical practice emphasizes the use of storytelling and narrative as critical features of its methodology. Counter-storytelling adds another critical dimension to the narrative exchange by professing the intent to acknowledge the experiences of those with the least power and privilege in a society.

This study addresses how dialectical agency functions in the current sociopolitical climate of Cuba with respect to the potential constraints of activism that could be perceived as critical of the state, resulting in punitive consequences. Underground hip-hop was the most documented subversive form of activism, but other art forms are being used, and if they must be strategic in their display, what messaging lies beneath? How/ where was this occurring? What did these activists hope to accomplish? How did these edu-artivists activate within communal spaces to build broader coalitions?

I contend that the way we perceive our salient identit(y)(ies) is the central influence in shaping our reality. I also believe those influences can be affirmed as positive within an identification stratum, because it creates a sense of shared community and pride about that

community. From that shared sense of community can come shared social consciousness. This, I posit as critical to the activation of a collective and its subsequent liberation.

Afro-Cubans, much like African-Americans in their historical pursuits for justice, have used and continue to use creative mediums and methods as a way to subvert the controlling institutions that would regulate their radical messaging. They've also transformed communal spaces into social action spaces to educate and liberate communities. Explication of these practices can inform how transnational advocacy networks can grow, spurring transnational coalitions, and subsequent transnational social movements (David, 2011). Conceivably, this presents new ways of conceiving interconnectedness in an antiracist struggle while building global community with others. This intersectional identity activist coalition-building is already occurring across many diasporic spaces, moving the potential impact from local to the global.

**Question: What it means to be an activist and whose values we represent?**

**Keywords:** Afro-Latinx/Latinidad, identity, race, intersectionality, art-activism, coalition-building, collective consciousness, social transformation

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