



Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Presença

ISSN: 2237-2660

Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul

Morejón, Jorge Luis

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Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Presença, vol. 8, no. 3, 2018, July-September, pp. 563-591

Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul

DOI: 10.1590/2237-266069826

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## From the *Areíto* to the *Cordon*: indigenous healing dances

Jorge Luis Morejón

University of Miami – Miami/Florida, United States of America

**ABSTRACT – From the *Areíto* to the *Cordon*: indigenous healing dances** – The indigenous origin of *Cordon* dance in Cuba is connected to the *areíto* of the *Taíno* people from the Caribbean. The structure of *Cordon*, its function and relevance as a form of indigenous therapy is a new idea introduced here to this particular subject. Describing and reflecting on the process that generates indigenous dance as therapy, resurrects a *Taíno* dance form believed to be extinct (*areíto*); it brings to the forefront a dance that is practically unknown (*Cordon*), reframing it as a legitimate healing practice. Both the *areíto* and *Cordon* inform alternative therapeutic processes within the context of presence. The *areíto*, currently performed through *Cordon* Spiritism, more than a vital healing resource for the community in which it takes place, it is also an expression of living *tainidad*.

Keywords: **Mediumship. Extra Sensorial. Transmission. Knock of Work. *Tainidad*.**

**RÉSUMÉ – De l'*Areíto* au *Cordón*: danses curatives indigènes** – L'origine indigène de la danse du *cordón* à Cuba est liée à l'*areíto* du peuple Taíno des Caraïbes. La structure du *cordón*, sa fonction et son importance en tant que forme de thérapie indigène configurent ici une idée nouvelle au sujet de ce thème précis. En décrivant et en réfléchissant sur le processus qui donne naissance à la danse indigène comme thérapie, ce texte fait réapparaître une forme de danse Taíno considérée disparue (l'*areíto*); il fait remonter à la surface une danse presque inconnue (le *cordón*), la redéfinissant comme une pratique de guérison authentique. Ces deux pratiques, l'*areíto* et le *cordón*, constituent des processus thérapeutiques alternatifs dans le contexte de la présence. L'*areíto*, pratiqué actuellement dans le cadre du spiritisme de *Cordón*, plus qu'une ressource curative vitale pour la communauté dans laquelle il a lieu, est aussi une expression vivante de la *tainidad*.

Mots-clés: **Médiumnité. Extra-sensoriel. *Transmisión*. *Golpe de Trabajo*. *Tainidad*.**

**RESUMO – Do *Areíto* ao *Cordón*: danças curativas indígenas** – A origem indígena da dança do *cordón* em Cuba está ligada ao *areíto* do povo Taíno do Caribe. A estrutura do *cordón*, sua função e sua relevância como uma forma de terapia indígena é uma ideia nova aqui introduzida a respeito deste tema específico. Ao descrever e refletir sobre o processo que origina a dança indígena como terapia, ressurgem uma forma de dança Taíno que se acreditava estar extinta (*areíto*); traz à tona uma dança que é praticamente desconhecida (*cordón*), redefinindo-a como uma prática curativa legítima. Tanto o *areíto* como o *cordón* informam processos terapêuticos alternativos no contexto da presença. O *areíto*, atualmente executado através do Espiritismo de *Cordón*, mais do que um recurso curativo vital para a comunidade no qual ocorre, é também uma expressão viva de *tainidad*.

Palavras-chave: **Mediunidade. Extrassensorial. *Transmisión*. *Golpe de Trabajo*. *Tainidad*.**



## Introduction

The myth of extinction of our native peoples in the Caribbean, as it has been expressed by Cuban professor of Native American Studies and former director of the Office for Latin America at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, José Barreiro, has contributed to the generalized belief that the Caribbean indigenous people and their culture are extinct. However, a number of comparative studies about the *areíto* dance, a type of *Taíno* performance practice, have been linked to *Espiritismo del Cordon*, (*Cordon Spiritism*), a religious practice which is still part of Cuba's living culture. Performance researcher Diana Taylor revitalizes the concept of the *areíto* in her book *The Archive and the Repertoire* by proposing it as a model to substitute Western performance structures in our continent by an indigenous model. She defines the *areíto* as a “song-dance”, a term used by the “conquerors” to describe “[...] a collective act involving singing, dancing, celebration, and worship that claimed aesthetic as well as sociopolitical and religious legitimacy” (Taylor, 2003, p. 15). I believe *Cordon* practitioners have managed to keep a performative structure rooted in *Taíno* indigenous tradition as a manifestation of living culture.

The importance of the *areíto* is that it “blurs all Aristotelian notions of discretely developed genres, publics and ends” (Taylor, 2003, p. 15). Thus, different from Western performances, the *areíto* is more of a performance complex that included social events such as weddings and intertribal construction of new dwellings; religious ceremonies such as the dances to the god Hurakan, and entertainment events such as the storytelling of personal and tribal stories. Thus, the *areíto* is a performance model that “[...] exceeds compartmentalization either by genre (song-dance), by participant/actors or by intended effect (religious, sociopolitical, aesthetic)” (Taylor 2003, p. 15). As an artist in search for a new sense of Caribbean indigenous consciousness, I situate the *areíto* within the context of *Cordon Spiritism*, specifically the *Cordon* dance. I discuss *Cordon* in terms of its origin, its circular structure, its preparation and its chants. In regard to its bioenergetic exchange capabilities, I explain *Cordon*'s relationship with mediumship, its historicity and the extra sensorial communication it generates. Its presence as part of living culture is described through the natural energetic transfer it facilitates as well as the five ceremonial stages performed for heal-



ing purposes. All of these important aspects are highlighted in this study hoping to call the reader's attention to Caribbean indigenous performance not as an extinct or obsolete body of knowledge, but as a viable source of healing still present and available.

### Origin

Cordon Spiritism is a practice which uses a dance ritual that exhibits the same characteristics as the *areíto* dance. Still practiced in Monte Oscuro, a town in the Granma province, on the eastern part of Cuba, near the emblematic city of Bayamo, the *areíto* has become what could be described as *Cordon* dance. Founded in 1513, Bayamo is the second of the first seven cities founded by Governor Diego Velázquez de Cuéllar (1465-1524) during the conquest of the island in 1512. In accordance with the Bules of Donation also called the Alexandrine Bulls, Pope Alexander VI gave the Spanish Queen and King in 1493 dominance over the newly found territories in order to Christianize their indigenous populations. This process of so called *humanization* took place through the construction of towns. This is important in establishing the link observed between those first Spanish villages founded by the Spanish Crown and the so-called *pueblos de indios* or indigenous villages, built in their outskirts, with that purpose, since 1503 all over the Greater Antilles. Cuban writer, historian, and archaeologist Antonio Bachiller y Morales (1812-1889) in his book *Cuba Primitiva*, mentions an indigenous neighborhood of Bayamo called *Bayajá*, which may be proof of such proximity and its possible influence on the non-indigenous inhabitants of the area (Bachiller y Morales, 1883). Since 1541, by mandate, mestizos and Africans were not allowed to live among the indigenous, so probably, the indigenous communities built as a result of this reconcentration policy were able to keep many of their practices and believes intact. This proximity may have caused, as well, the retention of the *areíto* dance by creoles mixed with *Taíno* men and women in the form it is performed today as *Cordon* dance.

This, of course, was not a smooth process; because of its capacity to preserve *Taíno* culture and religion, the *areíto* faced the rejection of the Spanish government and the Catholic Church right from the beginning of the invasion and further occupation of the Caribbean islands. The *areíto* was banned by the Spanish Crown as early as 1512, two decades after the



Spanish arrival to the Greater Antilles. Although the ban was officially reversed in 1518, such legalized opposition framed the *Taíno* habit of producing indigenous phenomena, disguised perhaps under false semblance. Probably, the *areíto* went underground to eventually emerge as *Cordon* dance, the performance aspect of *Cordon* Spiritism. Compared to the *areíto*, *Cordon* dance is a syncretic form that includes indigenous, Catholic and Spiritism beliefs. Referencing the ideas of Lisa Blackman, Professor of Embodiment and Experience, I refer to Spiritism as extra sensorial perception and communication with nonmaterial forms, or, as I call them, disembodied entities (Blackman, 2012). Thus, the *areíto* was an autochthonous indigenous performance complex based mainly on embodied experiences such as dancing and chanting in circles while holding hands, to invoke disembodied entities familiar to the *Taíno*.

Cuban writer and journalist Angel Lago Vieito, in his analysis of Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz (1881-1969) and his study about the origin of the *Cordon* ceremony, calls our attention to the possible presence of surviving indigenous religion in the ritual. Ortiz, however, concluded that the *Cordon* had no indigenous influence, stating that the belief in immortal spirits, in apparitions and mystic ecstasies, rather, belong to all early stages of humanity's evolution (Ortiz *apud* Vieito, n.d.). This is very similar to what *Cordon*'s mediums do today, but for a different reason. With that said, it is important to note that Ortiz admitted that "Cuban indigenous people had their dance rituals to '*sacar muertos*', or 'remove the dead'" (Ortiz *apud* Vieito, n.d., n.p.). The indigenous practice of removing the dead, explained by anthropological archaeologist Jeffrey P. Blomster, in reference to Mesoamerican rituals of death, removes the dead from the domain of the living. It demarcates them as dead or somehow different from living members of society who negotiate the ritual space by putting their dancing bodies on the line. The dance in this case mediates the relationship between the dead and the living members of the community but does not aim at communicating with them for healing purposes as *Cordon* mediums do. If the connection between *areíto* and *Cordon* is indeed true, this means, that *Taínos*, also worked with extra sensorial communication and that such communication probably took place while in trance, a phenomenon that can be described as a form of "energetic exchange or interchange that has psychic pool" (Blackman, 2012).

For the *Taíno*, this energetic exchange was probably essential in the process of communicating with their ancestors. For this, they relied on the *behique*, “a name meaning priest and medicine man/witchdoctor”, who played the role of a modern medium (Clayton, 2012, p. 70). The *behique*’s suggestions, the drumming of the *mayohuacan* and the ingestion of psycho-active substances or fermented beverages made out of the *yucca* root, all facilitated this altered state of consciousness or trance. This trance, framed by the dance, seems to have facilitated communication with the spirits. Modern Cubans who practice Scientific or Table Spiritism, “perform their spiritual tasks sitting at a table”, whereas those who engage in Hybrid Spiritism or *Cruzado*, rely on animal sacrifices, consumption of their blood and the preparation of brews (Saenz Coopat; Vinueza 2007, p. 39). *Cordon* or Circle Spiritism practitioners, like *Taínos*, establish this communication with the ancestors in a performative and embodied way which is manifested through the dance.

Mistakenly, Ortiz echoed the currently discredited point of view that none of this took place beyond the sixteenth century, arguing that “[...] the indigenous people of Cuba disappeared and were replaced by black Africans who occupied their position in the social scale” (Ortiz *apud* Vieito, n.d., n.p). This seems a contradiction worth clarifying. After referring to the Spanish persecution of indigenous beliefs, (which occurred after the sixteenth century), Ortiz declared in later works that “[...] they, (the indigenous beliefs), should have easily passed from the indigenous sacro-magic ideology to their syncretism along with Spanish paralleled ideas” (Ortiz *apud* Vieito, n.d., n.p). It is difficult to imagine the survival of indigenous sacro-magic beliefs without the survival of indigenous people themselves. The syncretism is indeed observable because indigenous people still exist. As the *areíto* re-emerged through *Cordon*’s catholicized prayers enunciated at the beginning of the session, so did indigenous descendants of those first re-concentrated populations of the area and elsewhere in the island, the so-called *pueblos de índios*.

The *areíto* is also associated with other folk religions from rural areas, presumably of *guajiro* (mestizo) origin, which is related to indigenous practices. It has been also linked, as argued by Cuban philosopher Jorge Ramirez Calzadilla, “[...] to a lesser degree, with religions of African origin” (2005, p. 202). However, when it comes to the dance aspect of *Cordon*

Spiritism, the bodies produced as a result of such syncretic influences remain indigenous. Looked at through the gaze of early ethnologists, their bodies are Arawak, when dancing in a backward and forward repetitive step. They are Warau in the “measured stamping” of their feet (Wood, 1882, p. 2154). They do not express the torso mobility of the African bodies in Cuba, but the stern execution of the dances of the Orinoco Valley. This means that as mediums of expression, *Cordon* dancing bodies are symbols and agents of change that represent indigenous consciousness, resurgence and presence.

*Taíno* social meaning is inscribed in *Cordon* dancing bodies as a form of moving text that performs *tainidad*. When *cordoneros*, the name *Cordon* dancers are given by the community, dance, they become a primary site for the construction and performance of *Taíno* visibility. The dance, and not the bones, as expressed by Blomster in reference to Oaxaca’s death rituals of *sacar muertos*, is a “durable signifier of the person and an important referent in the construction and performance” of *Taíno* memory, *Taíno* aesthetics and *Taíno* healing (Blomster, 2011, p. 106). Their circular ritual, then and now, continues to be a reminder of ancestral healing practices, emerging from centuries of colonial erasure.

## The Circle

*Cordon* dance owes its name precisely to the fact that the participants stand, holding hands, forming a circular cord or string of people. The *areítos* danced by the *Taínos* were done in circles as well. An important element of the *Cordon* ceremony is that of the healing blessings, which can be described as a counterclockwise turn facilitated by the leading medium or *medium cabecero* (head medium). The leading medium, who plays the role of the *behíque*, uses his right hand to hold the participant’s right hand, lifting his/her arm to turn him/her on his/her own axis, one by one. This movement resembles the sigmoid turns performed by the *Taínos* during their *areítos* “following the spiral lines, representing the cosmic vitality [...] of the great meteor” or the “sinuous direction” of the hurricane’s winds (Guerra, 1998, p. 12-13). This is an important aspect of the dance that, Spanish chronicler Pedro Mártir de Anglería (1457-1526) saw *Taínos* perform before a *ceimi* or ancestral spirit. It was also described by Father Jacques Du Tertre (1610-1687) in his work *l’Histoire générale des Antilles*



*habitées par les Français*, from 1667. Based on his description, Ortiz establishes the characteristic elements of the collective storm dances of *Táinos*, “[...] the typical sigmoid position of the arms, symbolizing the swirl, one hand over the head and the other over the buttock” (Guerra, 1998, p. 12). These storm dances find a resemblance in the directionality of the current *Cordon* dance of the Monte Oscuro community.

According to American Ethnic Studies Professor Yolanda Boyles-Gonzalez, turning counterclockwise is a “[...] symbolic and universal movement which means, the harmonization with nature and nature’s cosmic movements which are cyclical (circular)” (Broyles-Gonzalez, 2013, p. 180). In addition, when people dance counterclockwise, they move in harmony with the planet Earth. The Earth turns on its axis in counterclockwise direction, just as it circles around the sun in counterclockwise direction along with the moon. Broyles-Gonzalez underlines the importance of the circle at a human scale since the body reenacts and moves with the circular movement of life itself. The circle, one of the most sacred of life symbols, marks the union of all life and its cyclical quality. All human life is said to move in cycles which resonate and move with the larger cycles: day/night, seasons, the equinoxes, and the solstices.

The “beloved counterclockwise movement”, as Broyles-Gonzalez calls it, serves as a blue print for *Cordon*’s circle as it did for the *areíto* (Broyles-Gonzalez, 2013). Cuban dance researcher and choreographer Ramiro Guerra reminds us of the importance of the counterclockwise movement for *Táinos* in his book *Caliban Danzante*. Citing words of Spanish explorer Alvaro Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca (1490-1559), Guerra describes the *areíto* performed in the night in 1527 in Trinidad, Cuba “for the god Hurakan (Maboya), devourer of the moon, goddess of the night, lord of the winds and storms”, as a counterclockwise dance (Guerra, 1993, p. 13). The purpose for the *Táinos* and for the *cordoneros* seems clear; when your body circles, you are channeling energies. The circle and the collective energy it generates bring order to an otherwise chaotic event such as the hurricane, to this day the most feared of all-natural phenomena in the Caribbean. As expressed by theater and arts critic Benjamin Hunningher (1968, p. 13) in *The Origin of Theater*, “primitive man depended upon nothing so much as the order of nature”. The degree of tumultuous emotion along with the lack of adequate language to express it, turned ritual representation into a circular dance. If



only for this reason, Cordon dance could be described as a type on Neolithic “intangible cultural heritage” (ICH) worth “safeguarding” for future generations (Lenzerini, 2011, n.p.). The aim of this study is to preserve this valuable heritage by calling attention to its early origin and present validity.

### Preparation

As seen in the video *El Cordon* (2014), produced by Green Parrot Productions and Miguel Sague, *behique* of the Caney Indigenous Spiritual Circle and official representative of the United Confederation of *Taíno* People, one of the characteristics of the *Cordon* ritual in Monte Oscuro, is that before the dance, elders and spiritual mediums are served corn meal. Corn is an indigenous food that it is known to be part of the Cuban culture, but more specifically of the Cordon tradition. Before the dance begins, a long session of prayers takes place while the *cordoner*os, are all sitting around a table. Ortiz had already described practices like *Cordon* as expressions of a new syncretic culture, observed in the catholicized nature of the prayers (Font; Quiroz, 2005). During the various phases of the sessions, explained later in this essay, the participants purify themselves with herbal water. This is a practice that may resemble that of crossing oneself with holy water in the Catholic Church, but also the *Taíno* derived custom of leaving water outside the house to capture the moon’s light the night before the dance, in order to be used for purification the following day. In the documentary *Huellas Vivas del Indocubano*, named after the book, one can witness one of the indigenous women from La Caridad de los Índios’ community singing:

*Yo trabajo con la luna* (I work with the moon)

*Yo trabajo con el sol* (I work with the sun)

*Sol, luna* (Sun, moon)

*Muéstrame tu resplandor* (Show me your radiance)

Although the chant is sung in Spanish and not in *Taíno* language, the song reflects the use of magnetized water with the moon, the sun, and the stars. As documented by Cuban researchers José Antonio García Molina, a Cuban Studies graduate and specialist in indigenous anthropology, Mercedes Garrido Mazorra, a graduate in Education and performing artist and historian Daisy Fariñas Gutierrez in *Huellas Vivas del Indocubano*, this magnetism is called “Ser Naturaleza (Being Nature)” (García Molina et al.,

2007, p. 194). Faustino Delgado, famous *cordonero* in the Bayamo area since 1914, defined this property of the sun and the moon, *Ser Naturaleza*, as the invisible fluid from which derives the true knowledge acquired by human beings. For this reason, Delgado's gods were the sun, the moon and the earth.

The water can be magnetized as well by human bioenergy for healing purposes, a common practice in the Bayamo area. This practice involves the placing of water near the body of the medium during a connection with a spirit. The water acquires the same vibrational state the medium experiences during a trance state. In *Cordon Spiritism*, this water is used, as it was by the *Táinos*, to purify the preparation before the ceremony. The preparation involves the addition of special herbs such as *albahaca* or basil, *rompe sargüey* or siam weed, *salvia* or sage, *abre camino* or thoroughwort, among others. In addition, the medium may add a prayer in order to spiritualize the water. This water, as remarked by *behique* Sague, is used by the *cordoneros* for purification before the session, but also throughout the ceremony, as needed. Furthermore, this water may provide the necessary purification in preparation for the medium to achieve the trance.

### The Chants

The chant to the moon and the sun during the preparation of the ceremony can be considered a form of cultural retention. This form of cultural retention is also present in the chants sung as part of the *Cordon* dance vocalized as "*orile, olile* or *oringue* [...]" which have no defined manner of pronunciation and unknown meaning" (Ramirez Calzadilla, 2005, p. 202). Yet, as many oral traditions passed on throughout generations, these retentions have kept the vocal form without their literal meaning. In the video *Huellas Vivas del Indocubano*, Garrido Mazorra defines *Cordon* as a ritual of dance and song, in which, to the voice of the leader of the rite, a chant begins. These are a cappella chants led by a singer who chants the lead verses. The *Táino's areítos* were led as well by a singer-dancer called *tequina*, the equivalent of a modern choreographer who also sings. Guerra's description of the choreographic guidelines of the *areítos*, as documented by Las Casas and translated here, gives testimony of the dance and its similarities with *Cordon*:

They dance with loose hands and holding hands, or holding arms, in a line (single file), in the round, going back and forth (*corros*), in an arch (semicircular line), in molar shape (angular line, forward and backwards as in a *contrapas*; they promenade, jump and turn... it was a matter of seeing their beat, in their voices and their steps (Guerra 1998, p. 10).

In the *Cordon*, the participants respond with a chorus in a call-and-response fashion. The chants eventually evolve into just rhythmic sounds that accompany the dance. The dynamic in crescendo of the dance accelerates until the group achieves a kind of collective frenzy which Cuban musicologists Carmen Maria Saenz Coopat and Maria Elena Vinueza (2007, p. 39) describe as:

A climatic moment during the singing when the participants utter guttural sounds, or a loud, sibilant cacophony produced by the force with which they inhale and exhale at the same time in rhythmic alternation or in subversion of the pulse creating an effect of great expressive impact.

A cacophony, meaning a harsh, discordant mixture of sounds, is the cause and, at the same time, the consequence of the climaxed moment. Everyone involved in the dance aims at achieving such climax. The function of this moment of great expressive impact or “collective frenzy,” using Guerra’s description of the *areíto*, is similar to that of trance (Guerra, 1998, p. 11). In *Cordon* Spiritism, the trance achieved through the dance guarantees the healing stage of the session. Through trance the mediums obtain the information they need to heal others.

### Bioenergetic Exchange

The *Taíno* people believe that the ancestor’s spirits are always present. Spiritism embraces the same philosophical frame. As one circles with other bodies and entities, embodied and disembodied alike, one generates a bioenergetic field with all other dancers. At the same time that one aligns one’s energy with that of the universe, counterclockwise, the dancing medium or person with abilities for extra sensorial perception, uses electromagnetic force to create a connection. The guiding medium, the former *behique*, currently, *Cordon*’s medium *cabecero*, uses electromagnetic force to connect his/her body with disembodied entities in the physical plane. This connection serves as a source of information for *Cordon* mediums to heal community members seeking help.

The bioenergetic exchange that facilitates the transfer of communication from the disembodied entity to the medium cannot happen without trance. Trance here, translating from *Huellas Vivas del Indocubano*, is defined as “[...] the temporary possession that a spirit makes from the body of a person with the purpose of manifesting itself” (García Molina et al., 2007, p. 257). This person, the head medium, serves as the spirits’ instrument to talk and heal. The head medium is the former *behique*, who at times also played the role of the *tequina*. He or she sings and dances to facilitate the trance state. *Cordon* performance offers the necessary containment for trance to take place in a safe space. Lengthy, in crescendo, collective dancing and chanting, saturated with intentionality, embodied faith, and a supportive sense of community are the perfect recipe for a successful trance state.

This threshold or limen, referencing both, French ethnographer and folklorist Arnold Van Gennep (1873-1957) and British cultural anthropologist Victor Turner (1920-1983), respectively, become the point at which a stimulus is of sufficient intensity to begin producing an effect. This effect, in turn, leads to a bioenergetic exchange, which is so powerful that it creates, borrowing from Ortiz, “a transitory mystic ecstasy, with a magic sense” (Guerra, 1998, p. 12). The magic sense, however, can be prolonged or even made permanent. As pointed out by Cuban Comparative Literature scholar Gustavo Pérez Firmat, it can be “a place of habitation”, which means, not necessarily a transitional phase, but a life position (Pérez Firmat, 1986, p. xiv). Bioenergetic exchange has become part of the basic belief system *Cordon* represents, used to justify the existence of the entire ceremony.

Monte Oscuro, *Cordon* and *tainidad* are three parts of a common structure that defines a “conceptual archetype”, the *areíto*. This positionality (the conditions under which the *areíto* arises through *Cordon*), the factors that stabilize that position, (the participants’ faith in their religious practice), and the particular implications of that position (the dance is successful because it heals people), validates *Cordon* as a unique sample of indigenous living culture. Throughout its five stages, as explained later, the *Cordon* increases in speed and intensity reaching its climax (a trance-like state) when the sweaty bodies of the *cordoner*os, dressed in white, united by a cacophony of lamenting voices, interlace hands. The rhythmic stomping of their feet suddenly stops, creating a moment of closure in which the leader gives the



voice to conclude the session. Described by Van Gennep (2011, p. 11) as “[...] post-liminal rites or ‘rites of incorporation’, this part of the session may feel as powerful as the rest of the dance since it signals the return to a more balanced environment”. This environment, ordered by the dance, becomes, in of itself, healing.

### Kardec’s Mediumship

In agreement with arguments presented by García Molina et al. (2007) in *Huellas Vivas del Indocubano*, I state that many elements of the *areíto* survived and incorporated into specific areas of the country, especially in places like Monte Oscuro. This, added to the publications of nineteenth-century French mystic Allan Kardec, codifying the basics of Spiritism, had a great repercussion on Cuba’s development and knowledge about perispirits and mediumship. The term perispirit is used here as a “[...] physical fluidic envelope that acts as an intermediate substance between the material and the physical natures of the human being” (Brady Brower, 2010, p. 11). Mediumship, on the other hand, can be colloquially described as the natural ability some individuals have to intermediate the spirits. However, anthropologist Rosalind C. Morris (2014) offers a definition of mediumship that can be used here to explain the vulnerability of existence to vanishing and the desire people have for persistence. *Taínos* were the first group in the Western hemisphere to experience such threat after the Spanish invasion.

By staging the presence of their ancestors and their immunity to time, people guarantee their permanence. Mediumship is important because it is at the core of *Cordon* Spiritism, which can be defined as the ability to establish extra sensorial communication with the ancestors, which *Taíno* people called *cemis*. The *cemis* could be deities, known ancestors or even anonymous beings that accompanied the *Taíno* during their ceremonies. Thus, Kardec’s ideas about extra-censorial communication, served as a frame to explain the existence, manifestations, and teachings of the *Taíno* ancestors for some modern Cubans who embraced *Cordon*. Able to retain the form of the ceremonial dance, due to cultural and religious decimation, they had probably lost literal knowledge of the philosophical aspect of the *areíto* dance (Kardec, 1865).



This knowledge, practiced by the *Taíno* people as well, but perhaps better expressed non-verbally, was not rejected by all Cuban creoles. On the contrary; for some, it became a reaffirmation of their ancestral spiritual beliefs as well as their incipient sense of non-Spanish identity, reason why I think it spread quickly across the island. The failed doctrine of the Catholic Church as the spiritual justification for Spanish rule, the Anglo-American evangelical intrusive and aggressive missionary practices, and the exogenous cults introduced by enslaved men and women from Africa, all turned Spiritism into the new faith. This freeing form of mediumship had a relevant role during the last stages in the formation of the Cuban nation state in 1902. For many rural and urban Cubans, the ancestor's spirits were also part of the new identity.

The *Taíno's cemís*, just like those entities referred to by Kardec, were not just any entity, but spirits of the "higher order", who, in accordance to Spiritism's philosophy, have given answers and instructions on all subjects and questions belonging to humanity (Kardec, 1865). According to Kardec, these principles existed already among the ancients to be revealed to *moderns*. In antiquity, the study of this phenomenon was a privilege confined to certain castes that revealed them only to those who were initiated into their mysteries. Among the *Taíno*, these mysteries were known by the *behique* and perhaps by the *tequina* or leader of the dance. Their roles overlapped at times as it could be pre-assumed that both had extra sensorial capabilities.

Kardec's explanation leads one to think that extra sensorial communication is not a theory; it is a law of nature (Kardec, 1865). Thus, mediumship refers to a spiritual faculty that makes possible the mediation between the living and the soul of the deceased or disembodied entities. This philosophy and practice eventually became known all over Europe and the Americas through *The Spirits' Book*, *The Medium's Book* and *The Gospel According to Spiritism*, all written by Kardec. After 1870, a great number of spiritist journals were published in Cuba, such as *Luz de Ultratumba* (1874), *La Ilustración* (1878), *Luz de los Espacios* (1881), *La Antorcha de los Espíritus* (1882), *El Buen Deseo* (1884), *La Luz del Evangelio* (1885), *La Buena Nueva* (1886), *La Alborada* (1888) and *La Nueva Alianza* (n.d.), which contributed to the spread of these ideas. During the First International Spiritist Congress, in 1888, in Barcelona, three Cuban practitioners



were present and five Cuban institutions were represented; they were: La Reencarnación Center from Havana, El Salvador Center from Sagua La Grande City, Sociedad Espiritista from Matanzas City, Lazo Unión Center from Cienfuegos City, and San Pablo de Malpáez Center from the town of Quemado de Güines, Villa Clara province. However, although it has been said that “Cuba still is the country with the largest number of Spiritist Centers in Latin America”, none of these centers practiced *Cordon* Spiritism, except for those near Monte Oscuro (Cubainformación TV, 2013). This means that only those centers in the Bayamo and Manzanillo areas held sessions that involved *Cordon* dance as the means by which practitioners could establish extra sensorial communication with healing entities.

### First Cordon Center

Relatively soon after Kardec's publications in 1857, the first centers for the practice of Spiritism began to appear in cities like Havana, Caibarien, Sagua La Grande, Sancti Spiritus, Florida, Camaguey, Holguin, Las Tunas, Manzanillo, and Santiago de Cuba. Taking this into account, as documented by writer Washington Fernandes (2003) in *O Espiritismo em Cuba (El Espiritismo en Cuba or Spiritism in Cuba)*, translated to Spanish by Ulises Castillo, it is not surprising that as early as 1878, in Manzanillo, Anita Barrera Fajardo had already opened the first spiritual center. In this center there was practiced extra sensorial communication *Cordon* style, namely the kind of spiritism that is facilitated through dance. This probably means that the *Cordon* dance, marking the presence of the *areítos* described by Spanish historians Francisco Lopez de Gomara (1511-1566), Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo (1478-1557), and Friar Bartolome de Las Casas (1484-1566) in the early sixteenth century, as documented in their chronicles, reappeared in its new form since 1878. The ritual hosted by Barrera Fajardo could be considered the remains of the original performance practice of the *Taíno* people now re-emerging through its mutated form, *Cordon* Spiritism.

Spiritism became so prevalent that in 1890, there was founded the Federación Espírita Cubana with the objective of grouping all the organizations involved in the practice. Towards the end of the same century, a veteran of the Cuban War of Independence (1895-98), Salustiano Olivera Sanchez, adapted the precepts of the Kardecian System to the extra sensorial



traditions that already existed in his region, presumably of *Taíno* origin. Olivera opened his Cordon Center in 1910, an event that changed the course of the Monte Oscuro district. Eight years later, in 1918, Olivera registered the center in the municipal registry as *Sociedad Espírita Buscando Luz y Verdad* (Spiritist Society in Search of Light and Truth). After the opening of the center, the sequence of historical events in this specific region acquired mythological overtones. According to some accounts, a number of miraculous events took place which seems to justify the community's deep belief in extra sensorial communication through energetic exchange. Monte Oscuro's *Cordon* has been the seed-stocks of many other centers spread throughout the small region. *Cordon* dance is still practiced on a regular basis as a healing ceremony at the temple, a type of indigenous long house. The temple resembles the way *Taíno* people built their living structures: semi-open, with no walls and a *guano* (palm leaves) roof, which is characteristic of the vernacular rural architecture of Monte Oscuro (Lloga; Larduet, 2012).

### Extra Sensorial Communication

Cuban Historian Tadeo Tapanes Zerquera in an interview produced by Cubainformación TV, explains how Spiritism, referred here as extra sensorial communication, in Cuba, developed in three main branches, namely, Scientific, *Cordon* and *Cruzado*. Similar to the explanation given by Saenz Cooplat and Vinueza, Tapanes Zerquera defines Scientific Spiritism as the exclusive study of Allan Kardec's texts. He recognizes *Cordon* Spiritism as a branch derived from the indigenous *Taíno* dances or *areítos*. He emphasizes the relationship between *Espiritismo Cruzado* or Crossed Spiritism and African cults such as *Santería*, *Palo Monte*, *Regla Iyesa*, *Regla Arara* and *Voodoo* (Cubainformación TV). All these practices seem to be embedded in the world of disembodied entities. For this reason, the medium, the person able to capture the presence of an entity, maintains an important position within the hierarchy of these belief systems, and particularly within the *Cordon* dance. Therefore, *Cordon* Spiritism, the philosophical frame within which *Cordon* dance exists, highlights, in Cuba, a practice that takes place in a continuum. Using professor and dance/movement therapist Irma Dosamantes Beaudry's words, *Cordon*'s extra sensorial communication represents one of those forgotten integrative and transformative properties of



dance, still acknowledged among societies that follow an oral tradition (Dosamantes Beaudry, 1997).

Monte Oscuro is a living model of what an oral tradition must look like in its outmost surviving and cohesive power. Although Cuban cultural studies expert Carlos Lloga and Cuban specialist in popular religiosity Abelardo Larluet, underline the *meztizo* origin of Cordon by alluding to the Spanish and African elements that may have influenced the practice, the dance itself shows no vestiges of Spanish or African influences. On the contrary, when compared with the dances of the Lokono Arawakan people spread along the rivers and waterways of the Northeast coast of South America, south of the Orinoco and north of the Amazon, the similarities are striking. The Mari-Mari, for instance, “an often-wild celebration of birth marriage or any other celebratory excuse”, is a ceremonial dance that has a forward and backwards step that resembles both the main step of the *areíto* and *Cordon* dances alike (Blair Stiffler, 1981). Behike Sague, in his own YouTube channel reveals two videos of contemporary Lokono Arawakan (2017a; 2017b) recording artists whose backup dancers perform the forward and backwards step as well as the same rhythmic flexion of the elbows observed in *Cordon* dance (Youtube.com).

In terms of the chorographic guidelines of *Cordon*, *cordoner*os dance holding hands at the beginning of the session. Then, their hands are loose throughout and at the end of the ceremony. They step forward and backwards, as it is done in the “contrapas”, with a remarkable collective uniformity (Guerra, 1998, p. 11). When looking at Cordon through the lens of the *areíto*, based on the description given by Guerra, via Ortiz and Las Casas, one could say that *Cordon* is a collective circular dance “without image” (Guerra, 1998, p. 11). This means that Cordon is a dance that does not imitate working actions. The chant is religious, and it is sung by the dancers at the same time the dance is performed. The chant begins as responsorial, when the leader alternates with the chorus. However, it transitions into antiphonal, when two semi-choruses alternate in the chanting. The structure of *Cordon*, although mixed in terms of gender, keeps men and women separate within the same circle. There is a dynamic acceleration in the dance and the chanting that reaches a climax. The repetitive nature of the dance and the chant stimulate the trance.



## A Dance of Presence

For Ortiz, the important aspect of *Cordon* is that it had not been forgotten. Instead, it had been transculturated and syncretized into a dance of presence, specifically of *tainidad*, or better yet of *taineo* or even *tainia*. The three terms are used here borrowing from Pérez Firmat's explanations of the origin of terms such as *cubanidad*, *cubaneio* and *cubania*, in reference to the attempt by Ortiz and others to formally define these terms. *Tainidad* is used here to describe the generic condition of being Taíno; "the junction of nationality and citizenship;" a condition that, even if it ever existed prior to the arrival of the conquistadores, was never afforded by Taíno people after 1492 (Pérez Firmat, 1997, p. 3). *Taineo* describes the performative aspect of being Taíno, which in this case is manifested through the Cordon dance and the spiritual practices of Monte Oscuro's living culture. *Tainia*, like *cubania*, is a higher sense of being Taíno, a "plentiful, heartfelt, and desired" sense of *tainidad*, best expressed by the indigenous members of La Caridad de los Índios' community (Pérez Firmat, 1997, p. 7). *Tainia*, like *cubania*, when fully embraced, borrowing from Pérez Firmat, is part of one's inner life.

Ortiz uses the term transculturation to describe Cuban interethnic contacts, which I use here to underline the early exchange between Taínos, Spanish colonizers and enslaved Africans. Syncretism, on the other hand, is used to describe the periods of adjustments and maladjustments in the cultural compromises that took place among different ethnic groups and that produced a new syncretic culture. In this case, the periods of mal/adjustments include the early period of colonization and Catholic indoctrination, the following years of indigenous cultural and religious survival, and the later part of the colonial period. The most influential moment took place right before the instauration of the Cuban nation state, when all things indigenous seem to have succumbed to the concept of Cubanness (Font; Quiroz, 2005). This new culture, which for Ortiz was *cubanidad*, was crystallized, at a macro level, in the practice of Cuban Spiritism. Yet, at the micro level, specifically in the areas of Monte Oscuro and La Caridad de los Índios, this new culture represented remnants of what I take license to call *tainidad*, *taineo* and *tainia*.

### Natural Energetic Transference

According to Scientific Spiritism's explanation of the process of connecting with disembodied entities, the medium, through the electromagnetic fluid present in all things, is able to also serve as the means by which disembodied entities act on the physical realm. This electromagnetic fluid is said to keep the body and the soul connected in this physical world. History Professor Melissa Daggett clarifies that this belief, derived from a healing science called mesmerism, is based on the premise that "everything in the universe including the human body is composed of an electromagnetic fluid and that illnesses developed when the fluid was out of balance" (Daggett, 2016, p. 24). It was German physician Franz Anton Mesmer (1734-1815), however, who in the 1770s first observed that his patients went into trances, called magnetic sleep, induced by the magnetized water in which they were submerged for healing purposes. These trances, equivalent to what today could be described as a hypnotic state, allowed patients to "descend into dark spheres inhabited by spiritual beings" (Daggett, 2016, p. 24).

Mesmer theories about the natural energetic transference between all animated and inanimate objects became popular. His observation of the trance state his patients underwent during the healing process of magnetism, justified their sudden ability to speak in languages they never studied, play musical instruments of which they had no previous knowledge, but most importantly, communicate with the dead. According to Historian Cathy Gutierrez, their ability to communicate with the afterlife was used by modern spiritualists to enter "an alternate consciousness and communicate with the dead from this intermediate state" (Daggett, 2016, p. 24). These disembodied entities transmit their messages and get in touch with those who attend the spiritism sessions. Thus, it seems as if an embodied entity, once separated from the body through death, takes the active energy of the medium to manifest itself. This is to say that in establishing extra sensorial communication with disembodied entities, the medium, through the electromagnetic fluid available to all things, is able to also serve as the means by which these entities act in the physical realm.

Blackman explains that there seems to be a connection between understandings of electricity as an invisible flowing force, and the idea of an extrasensory, electromagnetic force that influences and steers the course of an

individual life (Blackman, 2012). Thus, these entities transmit their messages and get in touch with those who attend the extra sensorial sessions in order to communicate with them. The entity, once disembodied, takes the embodied electromagnetic force of the medium to manifest itself to other embodied entities such as those seeking help. This way of conceptualizing extra sensorial communication may have influenced the relationship Cuban *Cordon* practitioners have had with their own disembodied entities. The embodiment of the entity through the practitioner's own body is achieved as they are welcomed, in and out of the ceremony, throughout the several stages observed in their dance.

### Ceremonial Stages

As explained in *Huellas Vivas del Indocubano*, *Cordon* dance consists of five independent stages, namely: "Beginning of the Ceremony; Opening of the Raft; The Healing; Closing of the Raft and End of the Ceremony" (García Molina et al., 2007, p. 270). One stage leads to the next in consecutive order, so that the ritual accomplishes the objective programmed for every stage.

#### *Beginning: Phase I (Cordon for Mediums)*

The ceremony begins with a *cordon* dance just for the mediums. The formation includes both *medium laborantes* or laboring mediums and the head medium who leads them. Women placed themselves to the right of the head medium and men to the left, all facing the center of the circle. It is at this point that the head medium projects his singing voice while the chorus responds. "This singing is referred to as a *transmisión* (a transmission)" (García Molina et al., 2007, p. 271). This part of the ritual prepares them or *fortifies* them for the work they will do with the *implorantes* (the invoking). These are people who come to the ceremony because they have an illness, due to an imbalance of their electromagnetic fluid, to use the language of mesmerism.

Thus, the *cordoner*os are a group of men and women, a group of mediums, who, holding hands and swinging from side to side in the same place, create an ambience that invites the disembodied entities or spirits into the room. The transmission, in reference to the singing and swinging, is "slow,



soft and sweet” in order to facilitate the mediums’ concentration in the work ahead (García Molina et al., 2007, p. 271). It is understood that during this phase of the first stage, everyone is working towards creating the necessary conditions for the spirits to respond to the mediums’ call for their assistance. This, according to the *cordoner*’s beliefs, prevents negative entities to intervene in the work. The song continues until the head medium feels their collective vibration is in unity with not only their voices, but their thoughts and concentration. Once this is achieved, the mediums are clean, prepared, free of negative influences and ready for the next stage. This is cued by the head medium, once he/she stops the transmission and everyone becomes silent to start the second phase of this first stage called *golpe de trabajo* (knock of work).

*Beginning: Phase II (Knock of Work)*

Now the *cordoner*’s pay attention to the head medium, who begins to mark the step of the *Cordon* dance, which starts a new dance and a new transmission. It is called *transmission de rompimiento* (breaking transmission). The *cordoner*’s follow the head medium’s dance step and after he/she finishes singing his/her improvised verse, the chorus responds. Generally, this is also the phase when the dancers are no longer holding hands. When cued by the head medium, they begin rotating the circle counterclockwise.

The dance increases in speed and intensity until the rotation stops to continue dancing in place. Eventually, the dance becomes so fast that the head medium, knowing that the *comisiones* (commissions), the groups of spirits that will be working with the mediums, are already working with them, stops improvising and joins the group. The knock of work phase is the longest of all phases, maybe because it is the phase where the commissions are called in. This is not an invocation of the individual spirits of the mediums, but of those spirits that are part of the auxiliary commission, ready to work, and to whom the mediums serve as instruments. This aspect of the phase is signaled by the change that occurs in the chant, which is replaced by uttered sounds, heavy breathing, snores and all kinds of manifestations describing the embodiment of the spirits by the mediums. The sounds and the stomping create a harmonious cacophony that suddenly stops when the head medium feels the cordon of mediums is ready to start the healing process.

*Opening of the Raft: Phase I (Cordon for the Invoking)*

The second stage has two phases. The first phase is for the mediums to dance another cordon for the invoking, whereas the second phase opens what is known as *la balsa* (the raft), which is another word to name the invoking, once they are placed in the middle of the circle of mediums. This, I believe creates a vortex of collective energy that the group can then channel electromagnetically. This formation of people situated in the center of the circle, becomes the recipient of the bioenergetic field created by the dance and song believed to align the dancers with the forces of the universe. However, the objective, as stated in *Huellas Vivas del Indocubano*, is to achieve harmony between the mediums and the invoking ones (García Molina et al., 2007).

It is expected for the members of the raft to be mentally concentrated to help the head medium start the healing process. Thus, the head medium begins a slow transmission that is responded by the chorus, holding hands, swinging from side to side. To know how to heal their illnesses, a very deep relationship between the group of *Cordon* practitioners, the disembodied entities and the invoking, needs to be established. The song and dance allow for that to happen. It is repeated with the objective of directing the spiritual work towards the raft. The raft remains without dancing, immobile, in the center of the circle until it is time for the second phase.

*Opening of the Raft: Phase II (Reception of Fluids)*

During the second phase of this second stage, the raft remains in the middle of the circle receiving the *fluids*, or the *energy*, generated by the mediums towards the center of the space through dancing and singing. The objective of this phase is to call in the *spiritual commissions* of the temple so that they act upon the invoking with the aim of establishing a relationship between the spirits of the commission and the sick spirits of the invoking. This contact, in of itself, allows for the healing process to start. This is when the trance of the mediums, within the ritual, takes place. However, it only happens if the commission of spirits needs to use someone as a speaking medium, meaning, a person through whom the spirit can talk.

The dance comes to a climax when the dancing mediums arrive at a trance-like stage, an energetic exchange, a transmission, through which they call the *guiding spirits* who are responsible for the mediums. They are the ones able to allow the sick spirits to communicate through the instrument the medium becomes. However, here the trance is only manifested during the moment when the possession takes place. The spoken messages transmitted through the mediums while in trance will only take place during the third stage.

The dance ends when the head medium senses that the commissions acting upon the invoking have finished their work and leave. This is when the head medium signals the sudden end. The end has to be abrupt in order for the head medium to make sure the laboring mediums are not working without the help of the commission. Throughout this phase, the mediums become aware of the problems that trouble the invoking using the help of the spirits that work with them and that permeate the raft. This stage is very important because it allows for the medium to check and diagnose the invoking within the raft.

### *The Healing*

The third stage is the most important and central stage since the main objective of this stage and the entire ceremony is the healing. All other phases are a preparation for “*dar la caridad*” (give charity), which means to provide the healing. Thus, here the same circular formation remains as the mediums hold hands, standing up, “so that the cordon’s fluids or the energy they have created does not leave the cordon” (García Molina et al., 2007, p. 275). There is no dance or singing, at this moment, just the mediums’ mental concentration is required.

To start the actual healing, the head medium signals to the group of mediums that it is time to give healing to the raft. This is the moment when those mediums, who saw something (like symptoms) in the invoking participants during the second stage, and have a message to tell them, go to the raft to talk to them. They communicate to them what the spirits have told them or are transmitting to them at the moment. This information is gathered through their extra sensorial capabilities and it is communicated in the form of tips, predictions and any other type of relevant information.



Their help is manifested through bio-energetic transfers popularly known as cleansings, which could be described as the transfer of energy to them through their hands or in any other way indicated by the spirit (Nudel; Nudel, 2000).

According to *Huellas Vivas del Indocubano*, this is the only part of the ceremony where there are established an individual connection between the mediums and the invoking participants. Only those with a certain degree of mediumship, clearly feel the problems faced by the invoking. The mediums, who went into trance in the previous stage, begin to talk here indicating that the ill spirit of an invoking member of the raft is trying to communicate through the speaking medium. This may be the only opportunity the sick spirit has to express what it needs. At this stage, the ill spirit reveals the reasons why it is disturbing the invoking person, and so the mediums talk to it to convince it to stop bothering the invoking ones. They advise the spirit to overcome its problems; they try to help it, teach it, all through verbal communication. The rest of the mediums contain the space while keeping the circular formation around them. Once this is accomplished and the head medium decides is opportune, the consulting mediums return to the circle.

García Molina et al. (2007) observed that the relationship between the medium and the invoking is divided in three different moments. The first moment is when the medium feels in his/her own body the suffering of the invoking person. The second moment takes place when the medium tells the invoking person what he/she has felt as he/she tries to heal the invoking person. The third moment happens when the medium receives the sickness in his/her own body. With this negative charge or energy, the medium enters the fourth stage, in which his/her auxiliary spirits try to transfer the negative energy to the commission in order to take it far away from the ceremony.

Once the head medium senses the negative influence of the “*espiritus ignorantes*” (ignorant spirits) or that the negative spirits have left the invoking, the third stage ends. At his point, only the commission of the temple stays. Only very experienced mediums can perceive these changes and know when all the *acción negativa* (negative action) that permeated the raft is gone. After this point the head medium calls the laboring mediums back to the circle.



*Closing of the Raft*

The way the fourth stage develops depends on how the third stage went. It is the head medium under the guidance of the spiritual commission, who ultimately knows the best way to close the ceremony. This can be done in two ways; (1) if the raft has been overwhelmed with negative spirits, then there is given a knock of work; however, (2) If the raft has not had negative spirits, then the closing is done with a soft transmission.

*The knock of work*

When the raft has been loaded with negative spirits, also referred to as dark or less evolved, a knock of work is given. The head medium starts marking the dance step while the other mediums follow. The ritual gradually increases in speed until the head medium signals the end and suddenly finishes. This is done so that the temple's commission can influence the raft with positive energy aiming at gathering the negative influences still lingering in it. The knock of work is also suitable when the head medium sees that the other mediums are still affected by their contact with the invoking, which can happen when the work has been intense and difficult. The knock of work here, used to close this stage, is less intense than the one used at the beginning during phase II.

*The soft transmission*

When the raft is free of such negative spirits the work is finished with a soft transmission, a tune sang by the head medium responded by the chorus while holding hands. It is possible that the head medium marks the dance step, but always soft, in tune with the transmission.

To end stage four, the head medium asks the invoking to leave the cordon. This leaves the circle only with the mediums.

*End of the Ceremony*

The end of the ceremony can happen in several ways. One possibility is for the chorus of mediums to do a collective cleansing while holding hands. This is important due to the need mediums have to be cleansed after being working with negative influences. The mediums lift their arms, while



holding hands, and shake their bodies as if wanting to get rid of something negative. They repeat the move three times while pronouncing a kind of mantra: *por la fé, la esperanza y la caridad* (for faith, hope and charity). This ends the cleansing and the ceremony.

Another way to end the ceremony is by simply saying a collective prayer, holding hands, to then do the *entrega* (delivery), which means, to perform the collective cleansing explained above. There is one aspect that makes this step different; instead of saying the mantra, they produce a sound when they inhale, while raising their arms, and one when they exhale, while bringing them down. They could also end the work by doing the turns of *desenvolvimiento* (development). The procedure used for this last cleansing is similar to that of the healing blessings, explained in the section about the circle, in which the mediums hold hands and, lifting their arms above their heads, turn each other three times counterclockwise. Then, they cleanse themselves by shaking their hands and arms.

Often, to end the ceremony, the head medium sings a slow transmission responded by the chorus of mediums as they hold hands. Sometimes, the opposite happens if necessary; they end with a knock of work. According to *Huellas Vivas del Indocubano*, what matters is that the medium is assisted by the familiar spirits, the guiding spirits or other entities that sympathize with him/her to cleanse him/her. Thus, under the influence of the temple's commission, any ending serves the purpose of calling those positive spirits, who agree with the medium, to protect them.

## Conclusion

Many healing elements of *Cordon* dance derive from the *areítos*. The *Cordon* rite accomplishes an extra sensorial dialogue between the medium's positive entities and the negative entities brought to the ceremony by the invoking or the sick searching for help. This turns into a uniquely effective negotiation between good and evil, as embodied by the mediums, through which the ill wins his/her health back. Framed by *Cordon* Spiritism's philosophical teachings, *Cordon*'s purpose is to heal people in the Monte Oscuro's community and other centers. Dance and song serve as an instrument of consciousness and at the same time a vehicle for mediating unknown forces, releasing blocked emotions, and generating individual and collective



transformation (Dosamantes-Beaudry, 1997). With a clear origin in the *areíto* of the *Taíno* people, *Cordon* could inform an alternative healing process rooted in the indigenous culture of the Caribbean. *Areíto* and *Cordon* are two sides of the same coin, and as such, both offer important information needed to maintain indigenous wisdom in our contemporary society. *Cordon*'s ritual stages illustrate indigenous performance, not as a museum piece, not as entertainment, but as vital aspect of Caribbean indigenous healing practices. Thus, it is a matter of how indigenous practitioners from the Caribbean and the Diaspora manage to incorporate such wisdom within the context of new revitalized healing practices.

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Jorge Luis Morejón's artistic versatility has been nourished by almost three decades of theatre, opera, dance and performance-art. He has a BA in Special Education from Florida International University, a MA in Liberal Studies from the University of Miami and a Ph.D. in Performance Studies from the University of California, Davis. He was Dance Lecturer and Coordinator at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. Currently, he teaches at the University of Miami. E-mail: jmbeni1463@aol.com

This unpublished text, proofread by Ananyr Porto Fajardo, is also published in Portuguese in this issue.

*Received on December 02, 2016*

*Accepted on September 21, 2017*

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