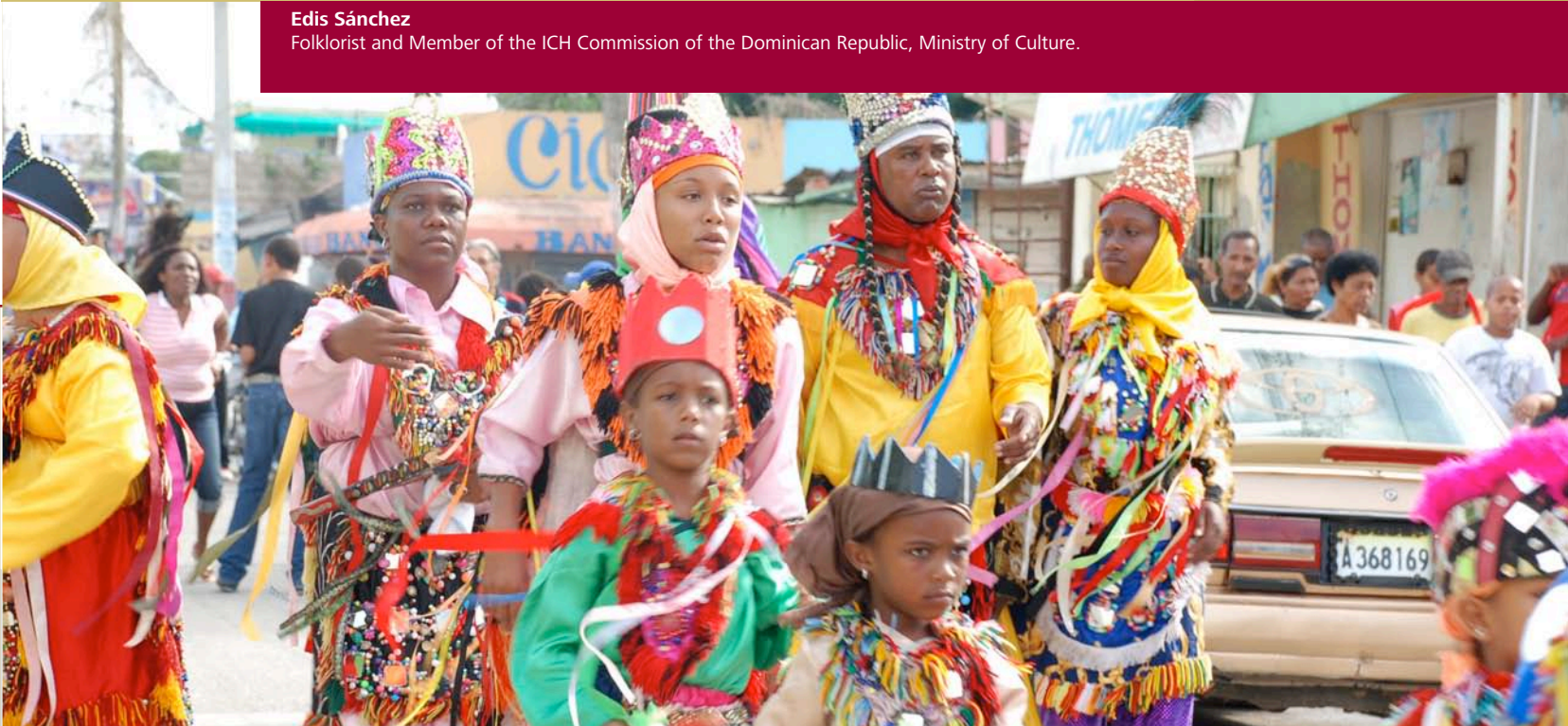


# The Guloyas *and Guloyitas*



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Good Morning Guavaberry Festival ©2009, Edis Sánchez

The Cocolo Dancing Theater in San Pedro de Macorís, proclaimed as Masterpiece of the Intangible and Oral Heritage of Humanity in November 2005, is the artistic expression of the roots associated with the British folklore and African cultural elements which currently form part of the Dominican identity.

It dates back to the period when Afro-descendants migrated from English-speaking islands, namely, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Anegada, Antigua, Dominica, Montserrat, Tortola, Saint Vincent and others. By the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, Afro-descendant migrants arrived in the Dominican Republic to work in the sugar industry as workers and technicians, at a time when sugar production experienced a marked collapse in the British Islands of

the Caribbean though a great boom in the eastern region of the country.<sup>1</sup>

On their arrival in the Dominican Republic, these immigrants were pejoratively called cocolos though this nickname is currently sufficient grounds for the nation's pride due to their great contribution to the Dominican culture. This community, that has preserved its linguistic and cultural roots, founded their own churches, schools, charitable organizations and other welfare institutions.<sup>2</sup> Their religious, educational, social, labor and unionist, gastronomic and sport contributions, among others, have been well acknowledged.

The cocolos merged their customs and traditions into those of the Dominicans, turning both into

a single culture with special characteristics. The most original features of this culture, known as *cocola*, include its music and dances and the corresponding creation of original or traditional groups, of which the San Pedro de Macorís Dancing Theater, commonly known as the *Guloyas*, is one of the most outstanding examples.

The most remarkable form of expression is the dancing theater performances. Their combat dramas evoke the British medieval traditions practiced in the British Islands of the Caribbean that were brought down to the Dominican Republic, though such traditions previously merged with African elements from the slaves and their descendants who worked in the colony's sugarcane plantations. The medieval themes were adapted to the political demands of the 18th and 19th centuries, as was the case of the play called *The Bull* and other well known pieces like *David and Goliath*, *Moko-Jombi* and *Mummies or Momises*.<sup>3</sup>

The musical instruments played in these performances and musical bands include the drum (played with a stick or cane), the kettle drum (played with two rods), the metallic triangle and the galvanized-iron flute. But the *cocolas* traditions are not restricted to just the performance of the dancing theater and the masquerades. They also include Christmas carols and string or scratch bands, performed during Christmas and New Year, as the ones practiced or being practiced, in part, in the British Islands of the Caribbean.<sup>4</sup> During the Christmas rave-up, they go caroling from house to house at dawn.

Their music and dance characterize the San Pedro de Macorís carnival, thus displaying the cultural mixture resulting from migrations arriving in this land of sugarcane bateyes (rural agricultural communities) and mills at different times. Luisa García,<sup>5</sup> who was Regional Director of Culture, stated: "The cultural conversion of our carnival has a name since 2005; it was christened 'Dom Pacheco'. The letters represent each migration arriving in the country. 'Dom' refers to the Dominicans; the 'p' is for Puerto Rico; the 'a' refers to the Arabs; the 'c' is for Cuba; the 'h' refers to Haiti; the 'ch' represents the Chinese; the 'e' is for Spain; and the 'co' refers to the *cocolos*. The *Guloyas* performances take place, above all, between December 25 and January 6.

The *Guloyas* rhythmic dances are outstanding for their different dancing movements, especially

when they lift the feet and then fall to the knees on the floor. Likewise, they play the flute, the redoubling drum, the triangle and the drum. The "dance on stilts" and the "bull's dance" are among their typical dances. Their colorful and vivid costumes also include brilliant colored stones and mirrors. Besides, they dress up with cloaks and decorate their heads with bright and colorful peacock feathers.

The *Guloyas* portray the Caribbean cultural reality. The Caribbean is the melting pot of the most complex cultural and social influences from India, Africa, Europe and Asia becoming the scenario of different and mutual fusions and birth of new and enriched cultures with their own roots, as they derive from constant historical migrations.

On many occasions, it has been said that "plantations—originated also in the Mediterranean—marked the economic, political, demographic and cultural fate of the Antilles".<sup>6</sup> "In their rhythms, dances, Creole carnivals, these seaside peoples have metabolized the cruel hardships endured when cooking what Fernando Ortiz called "our *ajiaco*" (traditional Cuban soup made of root vegetables and meat), that potpourri of features, accents, rhythms, and beliefs mixed all together in the huge Caribbean pot, but without losing their own identity. However, in the Antilles, where all diversities coexist, they all preserve their profile".<sup>7</sup>

Every action taken by the *Guloyas* confirms Carlos Andujar's statement that identity "is the permanent accumulation of values which, when modified and adapted, without losing its guiding thread, projects a sense of belonging, of attachment to a territory, to a history, to a social group, to a neighborhood, to a family and to a personal history which, taken altogether, can provide an identity reference in itself that, though shared, is particularly specific to a group, region, community or nation".<sup>8</sup>

The *Guloyas* performances portray the eternal fight between good and evil, light and darkness, the productive and fertile spring and the barren winter. Despite the fact that some of the main founders of the *Guloyas* have physically disappeared, their generational successors and replacements have continued the traditions through time, "displaying the melodious rhythm that internationalizes the San Pedro de Macorís and the country's culture".<sup>9</sup>



Traditional Parade of the Guloyas©2009, Edis Sánchez

### The Guloyitas

Moved by pride for traditions, the Guloyas from San Pedro de Macorís have created a school to teach their descendants to dance to the music of their own culture. The Guloyitas, as they are called, will be taking over the place of this current generation. As has been stated: “These children are committed to keep this cultural group alive and preserve its roots and customs.”

Now, the Guloyitas have performed a great number of activities for the local authorities who, in turn, support them in their studies and in social promotion through some technical courses. This example has been implemented in other spaces and two other groups have been founded by the Free Schools of the Dominican Ministry of Culture for children coming from bateyes in that province.

The training of these groups of children, an initiative originally proposed by a group of adults, has multiple purposes. On the one hand, to keep this tradition alive thus ensuring replacement of the elderly and, on the other hand, to train these children in the cultural tradition of their province, while encouraging them to study and develop for the future.

Specialists, together with adult Guloyas, have created, in the Miramar neighborhood, an annual festival wholly sponsored by the Dominican Ministry of Culture, with already many versions, called Good Morning Guavaberry. This has been an enabling scenario for the Guloyitas, and other rescued groups, such as The Bull, to present their best gala performances. This is an important space to disseminate the cocolas tradi-

tions, including their culinary traditions.

This is an income-generating event, for their performances are paid and they sell traditional accessories such as costumes, musical instruments and others. The modest resources gained by adult Guloyas have been devoted to strengthen their performances at provincial, national and international levels. This has consolidated unity at community level in their search for the welfare of every community member, with everybody's participation in a common cause, namely, how their culture can contribute to develop their living place.

The Guloyas and Guloyitas, in their own spaces and generations, have shown the significance of preserving that culture by integrating Dominican and Caribbean traditions. Art must be attached to its roots; only through this attachment can people advance to its future, as unique societies within diversity and enriched by their unity.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Mirfak Rowland.

<http://jorgeamarante.obolog.com/carnaval-dominicano-guloyas-205831>.

<sup>2</sup>La Tradición del Teatro Bailado Cocolo, en la República Dominicana. UNESCO Factsheet. Intangible Cultural Heritage.

<sup>3</sup><http://espacinsular.org/>. Acceso 11 de noviembre de 2011.

<sup>4</sup>Idem.

<sup>5</sup>Andrea Bavestrello: “¿Guloya from San Pedro?”, *DiarioLibre.com*, 15 de febrero de 2008. Acceso 8 de noviembre de 2011, 9:51 p.m.

<sup>6</sup>Ramiro Guerra citado en Dra. Luisa Campuzano: “La tercera orilla: el Caribe”, *La Siempreviva*, octubre de 2011, p. 43.

<sup>7</sup>Dra. Luisa Campuzano: “La tercera orilla: el Caribe”, *La Siempreviva*, octubre de 2011, p. 45.

<sup>8</sup>Carlos Andujar: Los retos de la identidad cultural dominicana. Feria Internacional del Libro, Pabellón Tribuna Libre, espacio Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo, 5 de mayo de 2010.

<sup>9</sup>Cesáreo Silvestre Peguero: “Guloya”. Tradición folklórica de San Pedro de Macorís, 23 de febrero de 2009. *CosasNuestrasRD.tk.*, gestionado por WorldPress.