DEFENDING RUMBA IN HAVANA

THE SACRED AND THE BLACK CORPOREAL UNDERCOMMONS

MAYA J. BERRY

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Para mi Ía,
Celia Llerena Ayala

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PREFACE

Jennyselt "Jenny" Galata was never one to answer my questions directly. In the ten years I knew her, she refused the format of a sit-down interview. To her, I was, first and foremost, her dance student. To remain her student over the roughly ten years she trained me in what I call the dances of the *Black corporeal undercommons*, otherwise known as *Cuban folkloric dance*, I had to abide by her rules. She required that I take meticulous notes after each class to retain her detailed corrections. She also insisted that I seek out informal opportunities to learn outside of our time together, to put my body in different situations where people were dancing, and to take notes on what I observed there just as carefully. These were the skills that she told me she herself developed to know what she knew now. My future graduate training in anthropology would lead me to associate these activities with that discipline's signature ethnographic method: participant observation. Yet contrary to the conceit of anthropology to gather "emic" or insider knowledge, originally established by European conquest, she was critical of the entitlement of outsiders who expected to be handed explanations for what they did not understand. Embodied inquiry required a different sense of accountability, and vulnerability. My dance training under Jenny involved learning what not to ask and other ways of knowing.

Jenny dictated that I would grow to understand the intricacies of the bodily techniques she imparted through the process of literal and figurative self-reflection. I once asked permission to videotape her demonstrating a step so I could study it in between our sessions. Recording dance demonstrations by teachers was a common practice for tourists who traveled to Cuba. But she refused. She alone dictated who would be doing the looking, and how, during our time together. Instead, she offered to record *me* doing the steps she had just taught. For her, my ability to see for myself how I was falling short was a more accurate measure of the extent to which I was paying attention and could reasonably claim that I learned anything

at all. In effect, she forced me to turn what Zora Neale Hurston called the "spy-glass of Anthropology" on myself ([1935] 2008, 1).

In the dozens of video recordings from this archive, I see myself from her vantage. The sight of my image is mostly an unflattering one to me. But then comes the sense of gratification from a mentor witnessing the fruit of one's dedication. I hope that at least, for Jenny, the recordings evince a student making mistakes but trying her best, over and over again, to adjust and do better. In these numerous video clips, the soundscape of the music and the noisy street is sprinkled with the tiny clicks of her freshly manicured nail extensions hitting the metal of the camera, and her shouts directing me, often harshly, toward an ideal. Also registered are my grunts of frustration at my inability to perform to her standard. Her validation largely went unmarked, heard only in the moments of silence rather than explicit praise. It is both embarrassing and humbling to watch. D. Soyini Madison reminds us, "That tension [between feeling foolish and feeling inspired] must always remain unresolved because it is that very tension that keeps us circumspect about our intrusions and concerned that our voyeurism is not gratuitous" (2010, 37). Although it wasn't what I had in mind to attain, I have a record of myself growing in empathy for what it feels like to be observed, with or without a camera lens mediating the encounter. More than any graduate seminar, those dance classes imprinted on me a critical awareness about the process of constructing knowledge about others through looking.

One day Jenny abruptly stopped the music in exasperation after I missed the drum's cue to change steps once again. Sweat pooled at my lower back as I returned to a resting straight posture and waited for her correction. "Do you know why it's important to me that you learn this? Because we are both Black women. And as Black women, we have to give ourselves value! Because no one else gives us value." Her scolding, prompted by a technical error in my physical musicality, affirmed a racialized and gendered consciousness undergirding how she knew her body in relation to others, including myself. Although she did not exactly ascribe to the label of "Black feminist," Jenny underscored the specificity of her experience as a Black woman. This distinctly intersectional analysis infused and informed the way she understood her dancing, the conditions under which she danced, and why and how she taught others to do the same. It also signaled the political stakes that converge in Black popular dance at the critical intersection of racialized class and gender oppression in Cuba. This Black feminist consciousness emerged historically in relation to enslaved women's everyday negotiations with violence, and it persists vis-à-vis the forms of

racial and gender marginalization that their descendants have continued to experience after emancipation, and after socialist revolution.

Jenny's pedagogical approach and critical lens demanded a kind of intellectual rigor as her student that I later located within a genealogy of Black feminist inquiry; it advocates self-reflexivity grounded in relationality with others and understanding how one's body is located within intersecting axes of power. Inherent to this praxis was a sense of worth, "value," as she put it, that Black women needed to give ourselves. Thus, she challenged me to engender what the larger society deprived Black women of, what socialism alone did not distribute, what no state would, or anyone else could, offer.

Approaching fieldwork as a fundamentally intersubjective practice of embodied entanglement thus shifts the project away from one of extraction, or secret-gleaning via assumed access, to one of participatory engagement in which I too was implicated and had a stake. *Defending Rumba in Havana: The Sacred and the Black Corporeal Undercommons* dutifully follows these movements already rehearsed by Black feminist ethnographers (both those who self-identify as such and those, like Jenny, who may not) while motioning toward future critical feminist embodied inquiry. That is to say, it contributes to and centers Black feminist genealogies of knowledge production.

While Jenny was not my first formal teacher of Cuban folkloric dance—after returning from an initial dance study abroad program in Cuba 2004, then offered by NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, I apprenticed under Neri Torres and her Ife-Ile Afro-Cuban dance company in Miami in 2005, and then continued my education under Xiomara Rodriguez at the Museo del Barrio in Harlem, NYC, until 2010—my decision to apply to anthropology graduate programs two years into my training under Jenny may have been facilitated, ironically, by her teaching philosophy. Around the same time, while finishing a master's degree in performance studies at NYU, I came across the work of Yvonne Daniel, a Black US American dance anthropologist who conducted fieldwork in Cuba from 1985 to 1990, a time when very few US Americans were permitted to conduct research there, just before the infamous Special Period changed the socioeconomic landscape, and so much more. Daniel was trained in anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley. Like others of her generation, she sought to orient anthropological research in service of liberation struggles waged in the so-called Third World (Anderson 2019).

In her landmark dance ethnography, *Rumba: Dance and Social Change in Contemporary Cuba* (1995), Daniel decidedly positions her research endeavors in solidarity with the Cuban revolutionary project, identifying dance as

a performative act directly imbricated with the monumental changes to the social fabric of the island. Similar to an important segment of scholarship about Cuba in the wake of the 1959 Revolution, Daniel investigated Black and poor people's "upliftment" or integration into the rebel nation's political project. Specifically, her study chronicled what was entailed in the shift from rumba being a spontaneous, community-based event that included a vast repertoire of dances performed in neighborhoods where poor Black people lived, to a genre of staged, discrete, public performances sponsored by state institutions. In that process, rumba became a symbol of revolutionary Cuban identity. Her research stood out at the time for its attentiveness to changing race, gender, *and* class dynamics. There has not been a book-length anthropological study of rumba dance since. However, her analytical attention to the arts, and the performance and performativity of racial and gender identity as a medium for the mediation of revolutionary contradictions, opened the door for the ethnographies of Cuba that came after in the early 2000s (e.g., S. Fernandes 2006; Allen 2011; Roland 2011).

Jenny did not seem surprised when, in the summer of 2011, I returned to Havana and told her that I had entered a graduate program where observant participation was a core research method, and my body, being there, was my primary entryway to understanding. The African Diaspora Program in the Anthropology Department at University of Texas at Austin, also born from the "decolonizing generation," where I eventually received doctoral training, shared the kind of political commitments to leftist revolutionary movements that Daniel expressed through her work. "The Austin School" stipulated the articulation of scholarship and activism, seeking social transformation through both (Gordon 2007). This articulation was compelled by both one's positionality and one's political identification. In my case, the interaction of the two, as I came to understand them through dialogue with others, indelibly shaped and shifted the way I thought about the politics of my research over time.

During graduate fieldwork on the streets of Havana, I was often mistaken for Cuban-born. For many, my Blackness and the fact of my Cuban ancestry, as a third-generation Cuban American, satisfied this misrecognition. Yet, I do not boast unmediated access to "the truth" as something pure and readily available, existing inside the subject or outside of historically situated and politically laden social relations of power. The constraints of difference between me and the community of practice I learned from were also openings for positioned paths of further examination; or as Marc Perry (also a student of the Austin School who researched in Cuba) has said,

they were "standpoint[s] from which to initiate conversations . . . not to elide power" (2016, 22). Although Jenny and I both identified as women with overlapping racial and ethnic affiliations, those identities were not social equalizers by any means. And even if I could, she wouldn't let me forget it.

Moreover, my interpretation of the sacred poetics of rumba rests on my level of initiation into the Lucumí practice at the time, warranting that certain explanations remained closed to me and, by extension, the reader. This study necessarily thinks through the social fact of the researcher's own positionality, investments, and sense of responsibility to the living and the more-than-human. Out of respect for those ties and boundaries of belonging, I take care to discern when certain explanations I was given should or should not be shared in writing. I hope that what is not published, or what questions are left unanswered, honors a politics of opacity, respect, and care that my godparents and the people represented in these pages hold dear. While this may be at odds with the logics of academic interrogation, it also has much to teach us about the dynamics of representation and political maneuver that this ethnography brings attention to. It is a delicate dance.

I found my footing thanks to Yvonne Daniel, who traveled before me. While firmly sympathetic to the revolutionary project, Daniel's dance ethnography deftly shows how rumba performance after 1959 performed the contradictions between socialist ideology and social equality in the flesh. Rather than evidencing the full realization of racial and gender equality in the Revolution, she argued that rumba might just as well be regarded as a microcosm of the revolutionary principles yet to be fully embodied in practice. Daniel identifies the important role of rumba in the Cuban revolutionary project and subtly gestures toward the constrictive bounds of rumba's legibility within those contours. She urges that *rumberos* must be released from any possessor's grasp lest the very meanings that fuel their artistic creativity be stifled: "Cuban artists, particularly *rumberos*, need and deserve such a loose hold" (1995, 142).[1] While acknowledging the merits of state patronage for rumba since 1959, her plea alludes to the need to go beyond a statist, paternalistic, self-congratulatory narrative of "lifting up" these humble artists to national stature in symbolically overdetermined ways. Her writing about the earlier revolutionary period is so skillful in its nuance and graceful in its delivery, just like her dancing (something she demonstrated when performing as an honorary member of the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional de Cuba). It had to be in order to navigate such contentious geopolitical waters.

Echoing Daniel, I call for a loosened attachment to rumberos' symbolic use-value for the state and go a step further to ascertain the myriad ways practitioners meaningfully deploy rumba in their everyday lives beyond its grasp. To honor Daniel's foundational intellectual labor, without which my work would not have been possible, each chapter begins with an epigraph from her work that I consider a harbinger for an avenue of inquiry I took up in a very different historical period (post–Special Period and post-Fidel) and in my own way.

As is the case with other Black feminist ethnographers who incorporated arts-based methodologies, Hurston and Dunham being fundamental examples, Daniel has been largely marginalized if not ignored in the intellectual genealogy of anthropology. Accordingly, she has been written out of its "decolonizing generation" (Harrison 1991; Allen and Jobson 2016), perhaps because, unlike others of her generation, she did not take as frontal a stance against the discipline; instead, she endeavored to reclaim it.[2] Perhaps she still felt the need to prove her "aesthetic project"—as she refers to it in her book's preface—as worthy of study, multiply marginalized, and illegible in its own way. I hope that my work can facilitate conversations with Daniel and other Black feminist artist-scholars among a wider cast of politically engaged anthropologists of the African Diaspora that have not been had before.

Despite all the decolonial turning in the discipline, mainstream anthropology seems to have maintained a loyalty to the mind-body Cartesian split in the academy that prevents it from taking Black dance seriously as a source of critical theory. While on the one hand, the disregard for dance is an acknowledgment of the limits of cultural representation as a field of political maneuver, on the other, it functions as its own form of respectability politics, if not a deep-seated misogynoir. And yet, or rightfully so, it is Black women who have been at the forefront of innovations at the intersection of the arts, anthropology, and critical theory. As Gina Ulysse exclaims in her performance "Untapped Fierceness / My Giant Leaps," "Why do they think so many Black women in anthropology keep turning to the arts!?" Performance frames of analysis and, specifically, Black performance theory do the nimble labor of attending to the generative forces that constitute Black performance (cultural staging), performativity (stylized norms that mark identity), and the performative (which "does something," makes a material difference) (Madison 2014). Daniel has written about Caribbean and Atlantic Diaspora dance more broadly: "In the moments of dance, feelings of belonging are generated and solidarity is affirmed, even if temporarily; in the moments of dance, feelings of fierce self-worth, strength,

and rebellion are also activated" (2011, 193). Maybe this is what Katherine Dunham gave up trying to talk to anthropology about when the discipline largely abandoned her intellectual legacy to be taken up by what would become the vibrant field of Black dance studies.

Defending Rumba in Havana contends that more concerted attention to how and why Black people move their bodies the way they do can uniquely contribute new dimensions to our understanding of Black political thought, praxis, and fugitive planning. Insofar as "movement might narrate texts that are not always legible" (Cox 2015, 28), through rumba, I attend to narratives otherwise invisible to the study of Black political thought in Cuba. Then again, Jenny's irreverence toward the academy, and her critique of the consuming gaze's entitlement to understand her at all, should remind me to temper any desire for a particular kind of disciplinary recognition. Nevertheless, this book offers a space for anthropology, Cuban studies, feminist studies, Black studies, and performance studies to join in conversation.

This book is indebted to the teachings and example of Jenny, the Austin School, Yvonne Daniel (and the scholarship of the foremothers that made hers possible), and the energies and spirits, both seen and unseen, that rule my head. I am honored to be guided by their creative maneuvers within structures of power and webs of relations in which I, too, am entangled and move. These movements are shaped by systemic conditions, political commitments, affective investments, and ancestral responsibilities. Iterative self-reflection on my role in co-producing the understandings I offer holds the study accountable for the situated place from which I observe, relate to others, understand explanations, and draw conclusions. I have endeavored to make this explicit in my work whenever possible, with the caveat that some things may never be put into writing for the sake of those same conditions, commitments, investments, and responsibilities. The reader may find that I have fallen short, but I have tried my best.

The people who take center stage in this ethnography remind us that Black popular dance is inextricable from the imperative praxis of the formerly enslaved to survive modern national development at all costs. In doing so, *Defending Rumba in Havana* demonstrates what a concerted analysis of people in collective motion can offer for sensing and sustaining fugitivity.

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An ethnography is only as credible as one's relationships are strong with people who share what they know to be true of their experience. I am forever indebted to the community of rumberas and rumberos who ushered me through their Havana. I pay homage to those practitioners who cleared a path for me to find my way, whose generosity of time and spirit shaped my thinking, whose connections expanded my outlook, and who are now ancestors: Geovani del Pino, Valentín Márquez Quiñones, Vladimir Silvio Quevedo Armenteras, Yerilú Lugo Valespino, *Ibae baye tonu . . .* Among the living are Jennyselt, Chan, Zulema, Lekiam, Didier, Ronald, El Gordo, Guillermo, Regla, Yamilé, Derlis, Morcilla, Silvia, Tailyn, Tito, and Lázaro. Tremendous thanks are also owed to Ned Sublette and Cary Diez for their long-standing work of rumba promotion from which this book has benefited indirectly and directly.

Intensive dance training became the pretext for me to travel to the Caribbean island that my maternal grandmother's family had migrated from. A study abroad trip to Cuba in 2004, the fruit of a collaboration between Catherine Coray at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts and Fernando Sáez at the Fundación Ludwig in Havana, opened a portal to this book's beginning. At that time, I was completing an undergraduate interdisciplinary liberal arts degree at NYU so I'd have "something to fall back on" if my professional dance career in NYC was cut short due to injury or financial unsustainability. During the classes with Danza Contemporanea in Havana and Conjunto Folklórico del Oriente in Santiago de Cuba, I fell into a new understanding of what dance could be. The endorsement and guidance of Fernando Sáez (who would later cofound Malpaso Dance Company) would make it possible for me to return to Cuba and continue training long after the completion of the program. Subsequent study under Alfredo O'Farrill (*ibae*), and Johannes Garcia's Compañia JJ with Siria Maria Robles-Rojas, and, eventually, another summer intensive with the Conjunto Folklórico

Nacional de Cuba solidified my commitment to learning the encyclopedic dance repertoire I continue to marvel at. These pages teem with gratitude for everyone involved in those early trips who opened the possibilities for my relationships to specific dancing communities in Cuba that would deepen thereafter.

At NYU, the Gallatin School allowed me to craft an individualized program of undergraduate study that instilled the rigor of and supported the unique challenge of interdisciplinarity. In that, Asale Angel-Ajani was an inspiration. I thank José Munoz (*ibae*) for making critical theory feel accessible and for making the master's program in Performance Studies at NYU feel welcoming. There I was deeply impacted by the teachings of Andre T. Lepecki, Randy Martin (*ibae*), Karen Shimakawa, and Barbara Browning. Jill Lane and Diana Taylor at the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics opened my eyes to a more expansive understanding of the power and polemics of artistic expression in the region's past and present.

I found political community in the "Austin School" that once occupied the Anthropology Department at University of Texas at Austin. As a doctoral student on the Diaspora Track, I found camaraderie and peer mentorship in Courtney Desiree Morris, Traci-Ann Wint, Luciane Rocha, Melissa Burch, Maria Andrea dos Santos Soares, Sade Anderson, Monique Ribeiro, Nedra Lee, Mohan Ambikaipaker, Lynn Selby, Ayana Omilade Flewellen, and, in the last leg, the brilliant and blazing sojourners of the Department of African and African Diaspora Studies (AADS), Gustavo Melo Cerqueria, Agatha Oliveira, Pablo José López Oro, Natassja Gunasena, Caitlin O'Neill, and Dora Silva. No amount of words can do justice to the innumerous office hours, detailed comments on countless drafts, steadfast advocacy, and earnest care that my doctoral advisor, Edmund T. Gordon, put into making the Austin School what it was for me. Charles R. Hale was another mentor who supported me and helped me process the contradictions I encountered in "the field" and in the academy without relinquishing the potential of both as sites of mutually reinforcing collective struggle. Christen Smith, Robin D. Moore, Omi Osun Joni Jones, and Frank Guridy made profound impressions on my scholarship and how I imagined I could one day inhabit the academic profession. Heartfelt thanks go to Deborah Paredez, who unofficially adopted me into UT's Performance as Public Practice program (PPP) and believed that a book about dance could hold everything I wanted to say. Abundant gratitude goes to Julie Skurski for sharing essential connections in Havana and for continuing to be my most meticulous and challenging reader.

Creative collaborations with Czarina Aggabao Thelen, Maria Andrea, and later the Performing Research Lab hosted by AADS held me accountable to a creative practice alongside my scholarship. Ninoska Escobar, Nicole Martin, and Cassidy Browning made PPP an institutional home away from home. The Black brilliance of Chelsi West Ohueri and drea brown got the dissertation written. I found my voice as a feminist thanks to the "Gang of Five": Shanya Cordis, Sarah Ihmoud, Elizabeth Velásquez Estrada, and Claudia Chávez Argüelles. Our collective work serendipitously brought me to Dána-Ain Davis, who has exemplified the kind of mentorship I didn't know I needed. In the broader Austin community, I grew as a teacher of the dance forms I write about thanks to the faith, trust, and support given by Odaymar and Oli (Krudxs Cubensi), Rebekah Fowler, Tonya Lyles, Tonya Pennie and the Austin Dance Africa Fest, Carla Nickerson at the African American Cultural and Heritage Facility, the folks at the Orun Center for the Performing Arts, and too many others to name.

My research would not have been possible without the institutional support of the Instituto Juan Marinello under the auspices of the Cuban Ministry of Culture. At the Marinello, my professional debt to Henry Heredia, as head of international relations, cannot be understated. Rodrigo Espina (*ibae*), an avid research supervisor, was a blessing. Elena Socarrás de la Fuente and Marcia Peñalver Armenteros also played important roles from their institutional locations.

This book is equally a product of both informal and formal graduate-level education in the historical legacy and lived experience of anti-racist struggle within the Cuban revolutionary project. A network of Cuban activists, working through artistic, academic, social, and religious institutions, and grassroots neighborhood organizing (often hand in hand) have been edifying for my understanding of the social debates circulating during the period the book chronicles. During this time, my accompaniment of the formation of the Articulación Regional Afrodescendiente de América Latina y el Caribe, Capítulo Cuba (ARAAC Cuba), was illuminating. ARAAC Cuba's executive board included Tomás Fernández Robaina (*ibae*), Roberto Zurbano, Gisela Arandia, Norma Guillard, and Lidia Turner, and was coordinated by Giselita Morales. The experiences of ARAAC Cuba's *Eje de Cultura* (Cutural working group), coordinated by Magia López, were particularly salient. However, many more people than can be named here contributed tirelessly to this civic initiative. Also notable and timely was my 2012 enrollment in what was, up until that point, the first graduate course to be taught on *racialidad* (race, as a social construct) at the University of Havana

(School of Biology). The multidisciplinary course was co-taught by Antonio Martínez Fuentes (*ibae*), Esteban Morales Domínguez (*ibae*), and Jesús Guanche. Many scholars from the broader activist network imparted guest lectures. Listening closely to and keeping up with this vibrant and diverse network during fieldwork taught me lasting and sobering lessons that infuse my analysis of the strategies taken and forestalled to address enduring racism in Cuba, and thus many are cited in this book's pages. The list of names keeps growing, but those not already mentioned who became ancestors along the way warrant special recognition. They include Inés "La Lita" María Martiatu, Serafín "Tato" Quiñones, Rogelio Martínez Furé, and Robaina Garmillo, *ibae baye tonu*.

And then there are the friends in Cuba who, over many years, have grown into family: Dashiel, mi "tocaya" Ana Mayda, and mis "primas" Juana and Tamara, watched me grow up, kept me out of harm's way, lent me a helping hand, and made me feel safe and cared for when I was the most vulnerable. Linda Rodriguez (*ibae*), Hope Bastian, Ruthie Meadows, Alexander Sotelo Eastman, and Amandla Shabaka Haynes provided dear friendship and fellowship during fieldwork. And last but foremost, Bárbara Danzie León, who, in addition to all of the above, gave me a home away from home and has even become a beloved *abuela* to my daughter.

A beloved community of Cuban artists based in the United States taught me what it means to belong in Blackness across fraught geopolitical borders. Whether in Havana, NYC, Miami, or Austin, collaborations, conversations, and many dances with Yesenia Selier (*ibae*), Neri Torres, Xiomara Rodriguez, Carlos Mateu, Abraham Salazar, Ariel Fernandez, Chino Pons, Pedrito Martínez, Román Díaz, Odaymar Pasa Kruda, Beatrice Capote, Melvis Santa, and Jadele McPherson kept me grounded and in good company.

Writing this book has required time and space to think, often out loud, with others. Some of the most influential thinking has come as result of feedback received at workshops or from speaking invitations. While finishing my dissertation, I benefited from participation at the Mark Claster Mamolen Dissertation Workshop at the Afro-Latin American Research Institute, hosted by the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research at Harvard University. After completing my doctoral degree, I was fortunate to accept a postdoctoral fellowship at the Institute of Sacred Music at Yale University. Sally Promey and the Sensory Cultures of Religion Research Group, the Anthropology Department, Josef Sorett, Rehanna Kheshgi, Soo Ryon Yoon, Albert Laguna, and Anne Eller, among others, made my time at Yale particularly meaningful and memorable. Subsequent

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I mark the moment when this manuscript truly became a book to a workshop cofacilitated by Kia Caldwell and Florence Babb during my Woodrow Wilson Foundation (now Institute for Citizens and Scholars) Career Enhancement Fellowship term, which coincided with the first year of pandemic life on Zoom. Jafari Allen gave more than a close read but a soulful recognition of, and advocacy for, the Black feminist spirit that moved the words to the page. Thomas DeFrantz had the most elegant and poignant way of shining new light on my work and calling me into curiosity about the stance from which I theorize, and the politics of the underlying premises entailed. I benefited greatly from Alejandro de la Fuente's meticulous feedback driven by his insatiable curiosity about Afro-Latin America, and relentless defense of the complexity brought to bear by marginalized voices within Cuban humanities and social sciences. Jossianna Arroyo urged me in generative ways to put a finer point on the diasporic scope of the book, naming its nodes across the Caribbean and in the United States, and to honor its kinship to *afro-caribeña* feminist practice, which she so generously models in the academy.

During a fellowship at the Institute for the Arts and Humanities at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, I received detailed feedback and accompaniment from Timm Marr, Florence Babb, Oswaldo Estrada, Serenella Iovino, Priscilla Layne, Townsend Middleton, Katherine Turk, Courtney Rivard, and Claudia Yaghoobi. Other deeply influential readers of parts of the manuscript have included Devyn Spence Benson and Elizabeth Schwall. I am forever indebted to Julie Skurski and Berta Jottar for many scrupulous suggestions in the last stretch that have made a big difference. Invitations to speak about different parts of this project at Florida International University, Williams College, UC Boulder, UC at Irvine, and Washington University in St. Louis helped me crystallize and enhance the work's

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Carlos: Thank you for continuing to be patient with me, day after day, when I've lost my patience, and my breath, which the hamster wheel that is this academic profession is prone to induce.

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INTRODUCTION

No electricity meant no fan to cut the humidity in the small living room–turned–makeshift dance studio where I trained under Jenny. In the September heat of 2013, the largely Black, inner-city neighborhood of Cayo Hueso was experiencing yet another blackout. In this run-down *solar* (tenement building) in the heart of the municipality of Centro Habana, the windows faced an inner courtyard, Havana's Black commons, where *rumbas* would have been "formed" (arranged, assembled, and given shape) by residents. "*Se formó la rumba!*" or "*La rumba se formó!*" is what practitioners exclaim to mark and describe the collective efforts that bring the danced music event into being. *Solares* (*solar*, pl.) are as much a credit to socialist housing policies as they are an artefact of endemic racial inequality and racialized class segregation (Hernández-Reguant 2006, 258). Forming rumba made these physical and figurative places, much like how Jovan Lewis speaks of "the yard" in Jamaica, into a geography of shared fate and communal striving, amid tensions and, in this case, increasing disillusionment (Lewis 2020, 2). During our dance classes, Jenny would shout, "This is not dancing for dancing's sake!" when I missed a musical cue, demanding I pay closer attention to the instruments with which my movements should be in dialogue. While learning to dance from this Black community of practice during a period of economic change, I came to an understanding about the stakes and the contours of what rumba itself gave form to. These lessons led me to theorize rumba as a space for an ongoing conversation about Black life, between the more-than-human and their kin, that started during slavery and has continued through revolution after revolution, reform after reform.

When my teacher yelled in the third-floor apartment where she gave her lessons, her voice echoed for all the neighbors to hear and feel. The acoustics in these urban courtyards allow sonic vibrations to permeate deep into the cracks of the walls, stovetop pressure cookers, and *soperas de santo*: ceramic vessels for stones that have been made into Lucumí divinities, called orishas,

who live with their spiritual children in these overcrowded spaces of Black sociality. Centro Habana is known as a cradle for rumba and home to descendants of the enslaved who are initiated into these African-inspired ways of knowing themselves in time and place.

The electricity had gone out in Cayo Hueso the evening before, part of the rotating blackouts frequent that summer as the state attempted to protect its fragile electrical grid while preserving electrical supply to tourist areas. These uncertainties heightened people's sense of frustration as the country underwent its latest wave of economic reforms. Miriam Galvez Carbonel, affectionately nicknamed "Morcilla" (Blood Sausage) by Jenny and friends, had arranged for me to live in an attic apartment above a bodega in Cayo Hueso where the neighbors picked up their monthly state food rations. It was a short walk from the *solar* where she lived and where Jenny often held her private lessons. I had slept on the tile floor the night before to try to stay cool, even though it meant risking getting crawled on by roaches fattened by the mounds of sugar and rice stored below. When I woke up that morning to the still motionless electric fan, I called Jenny to ask if she would like to reschedule the class. She commuted to Centro Habana from San Miguel del Padrón, a predominantly Black working-poor municipality on the outskirts of Havana. I did not know how the outage would impact her ability or willingness to come. I had already paid for the lesson in advance, but these were extenuating circumstances, or so I thought. She was unfazed by the precariousness of the city's infrastructure. Residents of Havana's poorest neighborhoods had to acclimate to daily inconstancy.

Studying under Jenny, I learned that she attributed her ability to make a self-affirming livelihood amid economic change not to state support, but to her *fé* (faith). By faith, I refer to her sense of self in the world as kin to African diaspora divinities and ancestors. She belonged to a ritual family that invested in a shared web of rights and obligations with the living, the more-than-human, and the dead. Practitioners are "made Lucumí" or "remade into Yoruba-diaspora religious bodies" through a process of spiritual birthing that entails "interarticulated body gestures" that "establish mutual living-ness" (Beliso-De Jesús 2014, 503). The term *Lucumí* refers to the enslaved Yoruba-speaking people trafficked to colonial Cuba and to the religious practices they inspired. As a Lucumí priestess, she counted on her relationship of "mutual living-ness" with multiple guiding energies to help her find a way to overcome daily challenges big and small. Aisha Beliso-De Jesús has called these energies "copresences," for they are "recognized as being on, around and within the practitioners' bodies" and are felt and

sensed through embodiment linked to a racial consciousness (Beliso-De Jesús 2014, 504). In return for her religious labor with and for family, Jenny's *ángel de la guardia* (guardian angel) or *padre* (father), Elegguá, the orisha who opens and closes the roads, would clear her a path for where she wanted to go in life.

While the phrase "*la rumba se formó*" may imply an air of spontaneity, the expression recognizes that rumba coalesces only through the coordination of distinct actions in time, each of which exercises different kinds of embodied expertise and conjoins to construct something larger than the individual parts. This something larger is embodied through music and dance and is felt as Black.[1] *Rumberos*—those who form and are formed by rumba—invest financially, physically, and affectively in filial relations bound by faith to save themselves from otherwise unfavorable situations and dismal fates. Those who form and are formed by rumba take center stage in this study, as they purposefully mobilize Black popular culture with spiritually endowed significance and within gendered scripts.

This work is anchored by the sixteen members of the rumba ensemble Yoruba Andabo, in which Jenny was the dance director and a lead dancer, and their intergenerational community of followers. Their networks in Havana spanned numerous professional rumba ensembles that, by extension, also became my teachers. The concept of "communities of practice" (Wenger 1998), groups of people formed by collective learning in shared domains of human endeavor, is helpful for understanding the many people I encountered from 2009 to 2018 in Havana. In contrast to the typical scholarly focus of rumba, which centers those who play percussion and sing, by highlighting dance expertise within my study, I center an underappreciated element wherein women play a vital role.[2] The following pages were born from the lessons I learned, both directly and indirectly, from the parts of their lives this community of practice shared with me.

The rumberos I came to know would often claim that *la religión* (their term for Black Atlantic faith practices), like rumba, was "in their blood," and to perform rumba was to "defend" it. While some may interpret such statements as predicated on an essentialist understanding of race, I saw it as a rhetorical strategy to legitimate claims to inalienable rights and resources they felt they were entitled to as descendants of the enslaved. They traced these Black-identified practices to their ancestors, both known and unknown, through slavery. Without monetary inheritances to speak of, they asserted a sacred entitlement to use these practices, as did their African ancestors, as tools not just to survive, but to create more possibilities for their

lives in the face of continued structural limitations and daily indignities. As I will elaborate in chapter 1, "defending rumba" was grounded in a Black politics of worldmaking against a long history of (neo)colonial enclosure.

As Jenny made clear to me in class on that hot September day, this was not dancing for dancing's sake. Yet, for what purpose and in whose interests did rumberos move? Or put differently, what moved them? And what did their movements form? *Defending Rumba in Havana: The Sacred and the Black Corporeal Undercommons* explores the stakes of rumba at a specific historical conjuncture: the period of Cuba's private-market expansion post-Fidel (2007–18), to "update" the Revolution for the twenty-first century. However, the post-Fidel period of economic change was only the most recent in successive reforms fueling racial stratification in Cuba (de la Fuente and Bailey 2021). Amid these restructurings, rumba has been mobilized by different sectors to either deny the persistence of racism or declare racial pride despite pervasive anti-Blackness (Bodenheimer 2013). Rumba references a long history of Black struggle alongside and around national development in the wake of slavery and within Cuban Socialism.

When I began doctoral fieldwork in the early 2010s, the Cuban state was decidedly "updating" its economic model to better attract foreign investment. The *actualización del modelo económico de la Revolución* (update to the economic model of the Revolution), under the leadership of Raúl Castro as president of the Republic and head of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC), intensified existing racialized class and gender inequality in Cuba. Yet, the state media deployed a discourse of "updating" (*actualización*) and "perfecting" (*perfeccionamiento*) the Revolution to evoke a sense of continuity with the direction of the Revolution under Fidel Castro. The state's vision of socialism for the twenty-first century might otherwise be characterized as neoliberal, given its simultaneous weakening of the social safety net, mass layoffs in the public sector, and other austerity measures that disproportionately affected Cuba's Black population. However, many insist that the state's retention of a planned economy and redistributive programs warrant its designation as "still-socialist." The degree to which the hostile geopolitical context of a punitive US embargo can fully explain the Cuban state's own economic mismanagement and inefficiencies is an ongoing debate among academics, politicians, and ordinary Cubans themselves. Labels aside, there is increasing consensus that socioeconomic inequalities in Cuba have steadily exacerbated and impacted the Black poor most acutely.

Concurrently, the 2010s were marked by the United Nations' Year of the Afrodescendant (2011) and Decade of the Afrodescendant (starting 2015),

during which Cuba vowed to take actions to benefit people of African descent. In 2012, the Cuban Ministry of Culture officially recognized *rumba cubana* as national cultural patrimony, and in 2016 UNESCO nominated it as intangible cultural heritage. Celebration of these achievements too easily relied on synchronic folkloricized renderings of Black people dancing, viewed as static cultural symbols of Cuba's racial democracy, while ignoring the worsening socioeconomic conditions to which rumba practitioners were simultaneously subjected.

Defending Rumba in Havana argues that Black popular dance provides a window into how this racialized segment of Cuba's peso-poor population choreographs ways to move beyond/around/under/through structural forces shaped by enduring race, class, and gender hierarchies that constrain their possibilities. "Peso-poverty" refers to the poor living conditions suffered in Cuba's dual-currency system by those who rely primarily on earnings in Cuban pesos (CUP/MN) relative to those with hard-currency (CUC) purchasing power (Cabezas 2009; Weinreb 2009).[3] Poverty in Cuba comes with free health care, education, and a social safety net that are exceptional for the region. However, as the Revolution "updated" itself for the twenty-first century under Raúl Castro, those exceptional protections were increasingly limited in their ability to meet popular need. Thus, this book analyzes Black popular dance not as a signifier of raceless ethnonationalism, but as an idiom of the racialized and gendered theories and practices people collectively rehearse to live dignified lives despite Cuban nation-building and its development schemes.[4]

Forming Rumba during Reform

Rumberos are a community of practice formed by the collective learning of rumba, a domain associated with the urban "Black underclass" in western Cuba. Yoruba Andabo is emblematic of the raced and classed meanings attributed to this community of practice, as chronicled in a 2011 song by the well-known hip-hop duo Obsesión. In the song, "Tú con tu ballet" (You with your ballet), the rapper Alexey "el Tipo Este" Rodríguez Mola (who is also a cousin of Yoruba Andabo's founding artistic director) invites a girl to see a Yoruba Andabo show. She responds: "*¡A la rumba yo no voy ma'! ¡Son gente baja todo 'esos negro' bailando!*" (I don't go to the rumba anymore! All those dancing Blacks are low class!). The song goes on to critique the ways that some Black Cubans disparage rumba to distance themselves from the social stigma

I.1 Yoruba Andabo performance at El Palacio de la Rumba. Photo by author.

associated with those—*gente baja* (low-class people)—who take part in it. Without sidestepping how Black people "*bailando, sudando, cantando*" (dancing, sweating, and singing) index a racialized trope stigmatized as *atraso* (backward), Obsesión defends rumba's centrality within the lifeworld of everyday working-class Black people: "*Ve pa tú ballet / yo voy pa'la rumba*" (Go to your ballet, I'm going to the rumba). Rumba stands alongside other urban musical movements in the Caribbean and the Black diaspora more broadly, like hip-hop, *timba*, and reggaeton, engaging overlapping counterpublics in a politics of Black racial pride that is seen as a challenge to Eurocentric culture, mestizo nationalism, and bourgeois values (Hernández-Reguant 2006; Negrón-Muntaner and Rivera 2009; Vaughan 2012; M. D. Perry 2016). Rumba is an event that this counterpublic forms. This counterformation of time and place constitutes a space where Black working-class people can gather, a refuge from the onslaught of racialized and classed indignities. It is in this spirit that rumberos often talk about their cultural practice as an act of "defense": "*Defiendo la rumba*" (I defend rumba).

These spaces were significant in the context of the economic reforms initiated under the Raúl Castro administration to "update" or "perfect" the 1959 Revolution. Existing inequities sharpened and had broad social implica-

tions (Carrazana Fuentes et al. 2011). Black communities were significantly limited as to how they could participate in the economy, mirroring their exclusion from certain places of commerce in the city. Local anti-racist activist-scholars waged critiques against the state for rampant employment discrimination in the private sector. The impunity such anti-Black practices were met with conveyed state neglect for the uneven prospects for the next generation along lines of race. These critiques were not new, but grew out of a longer history of anti-racist mobilization led by Black Cubans dedicated to challenging the dominant rhetoric of revolutionary exceptionalism regarding racism.[5] In this shifting socioeconomic landscape, the choices and resources rumberos perceived as being available to them were instructive in their particularity.

As occurred during the return of the Cuban tourist economy in the prior decades, religious affiliation was an informal form of social capital that rumberos leveraged to get access to much-needed hard currency (Hearn 2008). My study delves into how la religión, as a mode of community-based organizing, and being a *religioso* (a practitioner or devotee of African-inspired religion) as a category of racialized belonging and subjectivity provided a critical standpoint for strategically navigating exclusionary market relations. Similar to anti-racist activist-scholars, rumberos were critical of the way the state placed symbolic value on Black popular culture without paying cultural producers a living wage. However, unlike the activist-scholars who sought solutions by means of policy reform, through their faith, rumberos in Havana created other possibilities and places for themselves (Berry 2016). My aim is not to reify "religion" as a folkloric category that separates it from "secular modern" conceptions of law, science, and politics, as it is framed in Cuban state policies and everyday language, for this categorization relegates it to a primitive, timeless arena divorced from the politics of daily life (Asad 1993). Rather, rumba provides a window into how that which is marked as sacred, conventionally located within the domain of "religion," animates and legitimizes bottom-up mobilizations to form dignified lives within raced, classed, and gendered constraints.

Although the racial aspects of Cuba's emergent private sector have gained more scholarly attention, the gendering of racism in private-sector employment since 2010 has been less discussed.[6] The way the private sector capitalizes on the social constructions of Black masculinity and femininity in different ways (addressed in chapters 2 and 3, respectively) is important for understanding how rumberas and rumberos have fashioned dignified lives for themselves during the reforms. As state officials

calibrated rumba's usefulness for the state when seen as patrimony within the revamped national project, rumberas like Jenny choreographed rumba to pursue greater life aspirations than had been afforded to Black women folkloric dancers (a point mapped historically in chapter 1 and elaborated ethnographically in chapter 2). I see the bottom-up maneuvers of this community of practice as important for understanding how Black experience among the urban poor is gendered and how religious significations of gender anchor their responses to the liberal logics of nation-building, which the economic "update" brings into sharp relief.

This project differs from a familiar focus in Cuban studies on how everyday Cubans struggle to make the socialist system work in a faltering welfare state. Other excellent scholarship has investigated how the Cuban state has leveraged the social capital and organizational capacity of grassroots networks of support maintained by religiosos, and the complexities of those collaborations around official development projects (Ayorinde 2004; Hearn 2008). However, the rumberos I learned from expressed ambivalence about what continued investment in state employment or trust in the emerging private sector could yield for their well-being. Grounding themselves in their own notion of development, *desenvolvimiento*, predicated on access to labor, goods, and services to which they were spiritually entitled, served to offset reliance on both the public and private sectors.

Wary of the extent to which market liberalization and regime change could solve their everyday problems, rumberos consciously distanced themselves from the explicitly oppositional political camps that the state deemed "counterrevolutionary." The spirit-based notion of development that rumberos defend elaborates its own critique of capitalism. Its ethic of relation hinges on a theory of the human that is co-constituted by and interdependent with the more-than-human. The centrality of the sacred to the life of rumba performance and performers, I insist, reveals how Black subjects critically assess and address their changing socioeconomic reality by fashioning an alternate sphere of relation and exchange that they construct through embodied practice.

Building on studies that analyze local conceptions of what is necessary to live a good life and who gets to determine what is adequate for whom, this ethnography shows how those determinations are lived by this Black community of practice in Havana. As Hanna Garth argues, notions of adequacy are "deeply entangled with desires to live in idealized ways in the face of change" and these commitments are also shaped by gendered and racialized expectations (2020, 7). In contrast to Garth's work on food in Cuba,

my work centers a conception of entitlements beyond the purview of the state. As elaborated in chapter 4, these are *derechos* (rights) that are conferred through "religious work"; this term refers to an understanding of the rights of personhood and labor that rubs up against neoliberal modes of self-making. A focus on rumberos reveals a complex web of resource exchanges and solidarities—what is otherwise cursorily mentioned in Cuban studies as informal gifts or trades—wrought by one's membership within spiritual kinship networks. Where copresences provided the family ties necessary to weather the difficulties of more and more market liberalization, rumba formed a space for rights worth defending.

This "post-Fidel" context has shaped the stakes upon which rumberos perform dedicatedly practiced choreographies of exchange, devotion, and pleasure both "on stage" and in their daily lives. Practitioners defend a terrain wherein they perform a collective right, as heirs of the enslaved, to refuse the coercive logics of nation-building schemes and to enact socioeconomic relations otherwise. In this way, rumba communities form what I call a *Black corporeal undercommons*. Notably, sacred filiations and gender ideologies play crucial roles in navigating this space that rumberas and rumberos form through their bodies. My methodological route to this theorization employed dance training and performance analysis to grapple with rumba as a complex domain of human endeavor too often undertheorized by its relegation to folkloric dance. While this study insists that there is something to learn from rumberos, who are too easily overlooked because they are dancing, it also underscores the importance of embodied methodologies for Black study. To take rumba seriously as a way of knowing is to account for the embodied spiritual dimensions of Black political imagination.

The Black Corporeal Undercommons

"You have to know how to occupy the space," Julio César "El Gordo" (The Fat One) stated when I asked him to reflect on the key to Yoruba Andabo's success. He was a longtime percussionist in the group and responsible for repairing their conga drums and *cajones* (box drums) when they needed maintenance. He explained further with an illustrative example: "It's like this," pointing to the drums he had made himself beside the table where we sat. "If I didn't know how to do it, I would have to pay someone else to do it. Now I can do it my way, the way that I like it, and it comes out better. . . . And I do it with consciousness." He made sure to credit respected Black

male elders for teaching him how to occupy "the space" with consciousness. As the only phenotypically white member of the ensemble, this deference was especially important. Before agreeing to our first interview, he made sure that Geovani del Pino, Yoruba Andabo's artistic director, had authorized him to speak. Only with the permission of elder Black rumberos was he granted belonging in this space, and thus worthy of the knowledge and material resources exchanged between spiritual kin.

While this was, in some sense, true for all rumberos, El Gordo's belonging, as a non-Black man, illustrates what Beliso-De Jesús has argued with regards to how African diaspora bodies are made through complex rituals that hail "blackened epistemologies" rather than relying on a notion of biological essence attributed to race. That is, regardless of racial identification, those who become entangled in these webs of mutual living-ness are transformed into African diaspora bodies. The entitlement to hail what Beliso-De Jesús calls "blackened agency" (2014, 515) is co-constructed through "initiatory genealogy" (Palmié 2013, 160). During initiation, subjects are reborn into ritual families, called *familias de piedra* (families of stone), as children of specific divine energies or sovereigns.[7] The ritual performance of bodily patterns enacts meanings apprehended through the body, which activate webs of relation that are then reaffirmed through material exchanges that constituting belonging (Mason 1994). Indebtedness to and reliance on a specific set of racialized, gendered, classed, and generational social relations keyed one's affective registers to a sense of historical memory that, in turn, marked El Gordo's racial corporeal schema (Beliso-De Jesús 2014). While he remained conscious of the weight of his extra burden of representation, as someone who was not born into rumba or la religión through his blood family, he could enact legitimate belonging to his "stone family" through consistent observance of the bodily techniques and duties of sacred lineage that necessarily exceed and precede the demarcated space-time of folkloric cultural display.[8]

Knowing how to occupy the space—as a non-essentialist, racially conscious, and racializing spatial practice of embodied relation—is even more significant given the exclusion of the Black poor from the emerging landscape of commerce in Havana. Rumberos claim a spiritually endorsed entitlement, as heirs of the enslaved and kin to African diasporic copresences, to inclusion in a protected space of dwelling and fair trade. The kind of spatial consciousness rumberos form has consistently been intertwined with the ways global capital propels movement and migration. Lisa Maya Knauer's (2009) study describes the processes of electronic media exchange between rumberos in Cuba and those residing in New York City in the 1990s. She

conceptualizes rumba as a transnational subjectivity producing an alternate spatio-political realm, or "portable homelands" (161) that "resist both the territorially based constructions of *cubanidad* (Cubanness) articulated by Cuban nationalists before and after the 1959 Revolution, and the equally insular politically charged definitions promoted by 'exile' leadership" (165). Importantly, she remarks on how this alternate realm allows them to negotiate their relationship to the state from a position of racial marginalization, economic dispossession, and geographic dislocation. Rumberos in Cuba and in the United States both describe themselves as "defending" a shared space of exchange, signaling a challenge to capitalist exploitation *and* racial discrimination or marginalization (Knauer 2009, 166). In so doing, they are "producing and reproducing a sense of belonging not coterminous with national boundaries" (Knauer 2009, 160). I build on Knauer's attention to the alternate realm of belonging that rumberos produce through transnational relation, in contradistinction to the binary of statist vs. "exile" camps. My study tunes into the exchanges that happen across not only geographic space but also currency (CUP/MN, CUC), concept-metaphor (secular, sacred), and time (colonial era, republican era, revolutionary era), referring to the ancestral and more-than-human energies that populate rumba's diasporic political geographic imaginary.

This Black diasporic consciousness is performed in movement. Deborah Thomas has written about how the collaborative needs of Black popular dance inform our understanding of political life in the wake of the plantation. Given that Cuba was one of the last countries to abolish slavery, her insights are pertinent here. This was a political consciousness inhabited by putting their body in motion together with others (2019, 207). It came from the felt recognition of how the history of slavery bears on the present, just as copresences make themselves felt through the bodies of their kin. In those historical referents lay the guidance, bodily techniques, and communal practices for saving themselves. "*Yo te salvo a ti; tú me salvas a mí*" (I save you; you save me) is a refrain among religiosos that reflects a deeply embedded ethic of mutual aid for collective well-being rehearsed in religious practice and performed in other forms of community life. The way many rumberos described their performances as acts of defense—"*defendemos la rumba*" —attuned me to a contestatory politics of space invoked when referencing their lifesaving bodily practice. This consciousness inspired a geography unconstrained by national boundaries or restricted by liberal-secular temporality.

I call this space that rumberos defend a "Black corporeal undercommons"—a kind of Black geography found not in place but in choreography (*choreo/*

geography)—grounded by the spirited maneuvers of everyday Black people.[9] Through the mobilization of people throughout the city in rumba's defense, this racial spatial imaginary was made manifest. The *under* indexes their relegation to the bottom or to the margins of respectability, as well as their underestimation for critical thought. To be largely opaque to, which is to be unable to be grasped by, those who do not belong is to be powerfully unseen in plain sight (Glissant 1997). The notion of a *corporeal* undercommons is a recognition of the body's capacity to hold and transform space, while at the same time acknowledging how dance performance, as Thomas gracefully puts forth, "not only express[es] a political worldview but also enact[s] it" (2019, 207). This book fleshes out how rumberas and rumberos form a space that expresses a political worldview in gender-specific ways that we cannot understand outside of a rigorous engagement with the embodied politics and poetics of the sacred. Here faith in and indebtedness to ancestral spirits and African divinities are summoned to simultaneously underscore the salience of the history of slavery and carve out a place of autonomy from the state on those grounds.

The Black corporeal undercommons opens a deeper consideration of what Black people collectively moving on their own behalf have the potential to form and the will to defend. With the help of Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's (2013) concept of "the undercommons," I enter into critical dialogue with Fernando Ortiz's *hampa afro-cubana* (Afro-Cuban underworld) (Ortiz [1906] 1973, 1916). Following Harney and Moten, I challenge Ortiz's pejorative label for the domain of Black sociality to reconsider "the Afro-Cuban underworld" as a set of social relations (between the human and more-than-human) that enable the sharing of material, cultural, spiritual, and epistemological provisions within a larger project of Black well-being. The Black corporeal undercommons, therefore, highlights the role of bodily practice in reconstituting the literal and figurative spaces Black people occupy to sustain themselves.

This critical attention to how space is bodied forth has been a key contribution of dance studies and Black feminist geography (McKittrick 2006, 2011). Bridging these conversations within anthropology, in *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship* (2015), Aimee Cox analyzes Black girls' creative practices of agency within constraint as a way to make space for themselves in a country where they are not deemed worthy of the rights of citizenship. Cox writes, "Choreography is concerned in a very fundamental sense with the ordering of bodies in space. . . . Choreography suggests that there is a map for movement or plan for how the body

interacts with its environment, but it also suggests that by the body's placement in a space, the nature of that space changes" (2015, 28–29). Not least of all, "choreography, like culture, is a process of meaning making" (30). I contend that the social choreographies, to use Cox's phrasing, of rumberas and rumberos are distinct and largely illegible to dominant regimes of seeing and knowing Black people dancing in the wake of slavery (see chapter 1). Taking rumba seriously as a way of knowing, we can feel the beat of a uniquely situated Black political imaginary articulated through the body in movement and its formation of a space to call their own.

This work looks to social spaces where most politics is lived, the "ordinary" activities of noncompliance or deviance that are rarely recognized as political (Cohen 2004; Kelley 1994). While it is tempting to label these activities as "resistance," scholars of Black politics across the diaspora cautioned against the facile application of that interpretive framework. Cohen urges us to pay attention to intent. She critiques how the counternormative behaviors of Black people are overdetermined by the lens of "resistance," thereby conflating attempts to "fundamentally sway the distribution of power" with attempts to "create greater autonomy over one's life and make the best of limited life options" from outside normative structures (40). Deborah Thomas, on the other hand, insists that we contemplate the relatedness between hegemony and resistance, as "mutually constituting conceptual tools rather than oppositional poles" (2004, 258). Instead of looking to neatly categorize aspects of cultural production as either challenges or capitulations to dominant practices or ideologies, she argues that we might do better to take stock of how descendants of Africa throughout the Atlantic world have been forced to develop creative means of critiquing dominant structures through direct engagement with them (Thomas 2004, 257–62).

To be sure, the rumberos in this study make clear that they are not invested in a politics of "resistance" understood as opposition to the Communist Party or revolutionary state. They do not intend to sway the fundamental distribution of power in the country through race-based reform—as other Cuban anti-racist activists did at the time (Zurbano 2014)—much less aspire to overturn the state or, in the case of contemporary Haiti, "make the state" on their own terms (Kivland 2020). Instead of assuming undeclared or latent resistance, what would it mean to take seriously how rumberos justify particular actions on the basis of sacred subjectivity and religious duty? Their piety can readily fit within a folkloricized vision of Black culture dismissing their posture as, at best, comfortably apolitical if not primitive. At the same time, it may position them as deviant vis-à-vis an idealized construction of secular

liberal subjecthood in that it insists on a social theory of relation that defies the political coordinates of the Party and the State. Either way, their collective vision and political orientation remains opaque to the platitudinous logics of the ideological disputes that have governed Cuba-US geopolitical relations.

This book illuminates the kinds of social spaces and possibilities that rumberos formed and defended at a key moment in history when the Cuban state was faced with weakened economic allies and plagued by continued US sanctions. The most recent revamping of the political economy of the revolution is part of a long-standing plight to sustain its project of national sovereignty. Anthropologists have demonstrated how research in the Caribbean context is uniquely positioned to demystify liberal constructs of the human upon which classical Westphalian conceptions of formal sovereignty are based (Thomas 2022). New theorizations of the limits and possibilities of human relation are inspired by the everyday practices, sensory regimes, and affective dimensions that produce other conceptualizations of worldmaking that are broader than formal politics (Masco and Thomas 2023). Like the region itself, rumberos in Cuba challenge the concept of a sovereign individual who speaks and acts autonomously and are suspect of the notion of a neoliberal entrepreneurial subject who acts according to rational individual choice in the market which Cuba's new development design fosters. Instead, they insist upon, building on Bonilla (2017), their nonsovereign nature, their interdependence with each other, and their critical reliance on the more-than-human to order their steps and shape their fate.

For poor Black youth discouraged by their dismal prospects in the economic landscape of the new Cuba, rumba groups like Yoruba Andabo modeled the affective and material payoff of creating their own means of subsistence rooted in African-inspired sacred epistemologies and coordinated through bodily techniques. The collective mobilization of blood and stone family, linked through ritual kinship to sacred energies, facilitated an ethic of community-based subsistence. This ethic implicitly called into question the moral integrity of the discourses surrounding the campaign to "perfect" Cuban Socialism privileging foreign investment and increased privatization. Thus, the Black corporeal undercommons represents an alternative to the state's design for progress by devising alternative terms of economic engagement and embodying more affirming practices of self-making.

This brings me to the tensions that animate the book's pages. One tension is how to honor the performativity of rumberos' politics of "defense" without clumsily adopting a rhetoric of "resistance" that the subjects of this book consciously do not espouse. While I am cognizant of the resonance

I.2 Yoruba Andabo performance at Las Palmeras. Photo by author.

such an interpretation would find with similar formations elsewhere in the African diaspora, such a slippage is especially risky in the Cuban context where Black consciousness and race-based politics are deemed "counter-revolutionary" (Benson 2016; Clealand 2017). As in other parts of the African diaspora, Black political organizations in Cuba have historically been the target of state violence. Cuba's unique geopolitical location in the crosshairs of US imperial aggression has made Black political formations especially threatening to Cuban state power (Helg 1995). Thus, I grapple with how to lean into the counterhegemonic pulse of rumba's social choreography, into what it says about the specificity of the chances and choices that Cuba's Black poor disproportionately face, without recklessly betraying my ethical commitment to the practitioners themselves, who may very well depend on what Glissant has called "the right to opacity" (1997, 189).

Instead of assuming an undeclared Black resistance on the part of rumberos who cannot be named, what would it mean to learn from their own interpretive frameworks and thus take seriously their expressed religious intent? What does the insistence on the rightful hold that more-than-human powers have on their lives, which rumberos defend, afford that other genealogies of Black political thought do not? In other words, what does a staunch

commitment to the sacred make possible? What work does it require, and action inspire? Less concerned about salvation after death, the sacred is put to work as a common referent and collective resource in the coordination of a kind of grassroots Black mobilization that does not resist nor make appeals to the state, but rather orients and enlivens "the various movements, projects, and improvised tactics of those working toward a larger freedom than perhaps any state can offer" (Allen 2011). *Defending Rumba in Havana* demonstrates the importance of sacred pedagogies for countering Black political dispossession while at the same time decentering the state in the Black liberatory imagination. And, at the same time, I find these sacred pedagogies most generative for how they trouble the binary categories of "secular" and "sacred," "artistic" and "political," themselves. In this way, I am interested in how ostensibly mutually exclusive domains become unsettled in the lived experience of those who form and are formed by rumba.

Even so, readers will notice that the binary of gender not only remains salient within the interpretive framework of rumberas and rumberos but is even reinforced through logics coded as sacred. This brings me to another tension in the book, which revolves around how to locate the Black corporeal undercommons through a Black feminist analytics, without ignoring or minimizing the hold of gender binarism, heteronormativity, and patriarchy in structuring the way in which people move within its coordinates. That is to say, while Black people take refuge in the space rumba forms, and defend it as their own vis-à-vis the state, this dance is not a social equalizer by any means. As Rachel Harding (2003) reminds us, the term *space* signals both movement and boundaries (xvi). This book highlights that boundaries are erected around and *within* the space they defend. Therefore, their social choreography reinforces racial group identity while simultaneously accentuating lines of gendered difference within the group. Indeed, rumba choreographies actively summon and play with gender tropes, and thus gender binaries are reinscribed. I have made a concerted effort to think through, rather than elide, gender differences throughout, in order to situate internal frustrations between rumberas and rumberos. These frustrations carry material implications that cannot be fully accounted for by the notion of gender complementarity through which African diasporic religions are often explained. I do this by tracing how ideologies of Black womanhood and Black manhood have developed historically in relationship to white heteropatriarchy and the nation-state, and are expressed in the very material conditions that differently gendered people turn to the Black corporeal undercommons in order to mitigate.

The politics of gender also carries terminological implications. Throughout the book, I privilege the terms practitioners used to describe themselves. This community of practice follows the conventions of Spanish language grammatical gender wherein all subjects are categorized as either masculine (often ending in *-o*; e.g., rumbero) or feminine (often ending in *-a*; e.g., rumbera). For the same reason, I refer to rumba practitioners as rumberos in the plural, following the convention of having the masculine gender represent a mixed-gender group. However, in the specific moments when I aim to highlight the *difference* gender makes for my analysis of the group, I go against the norm and instead list out "rumberas and rumberos." Both in writing and in movement, this Black feminist has wrestled with how to ethically navigate and ethnographically render a space that holds the binary sex-gender system dear. However, more work can and should be done focusing on when those conventions fall short in describing the fullness of sexuality, gender expression, and creative social maneuver among people formed by rumba.

These tensions get to the heart of an intellectual and ethical knot: how to highlight the political significance of this distinct spatial imaginary without falling into an uncritical romanticized discourse that would portray rumba, and thereby the Black corporeal undercommons by extension, as inherently or necessarily a site of political resistance, much less a feminist utopia? How to self-reflexively bring my own analytics as a Black feminist to bear, but in terms that are sensitive to how such work can be taken up by political projects to which the practitioners themselves do not uniformly ascribe, or worse, would render them more vulnerable to patriarchal-state power?

Ultimately, *Defending Rumba in Havana* represents an emphatic critique of the paternalistic terms upon which Black people have been interpellated into the nation-state project that rumba's nomination as national patrimony obscures. The ethnography brings Black feminist attention to creative maneuvers of differently gendered Black people in Cuba within constraints that are amplified by the inconvenient fact of ongoing racism within a nationalist project that, beginning before and leading through the current Cuban Revolution, has relied on the professed realization of racial harmony to distinguish itself from the US empire. Black Cuban feminists have indicted Cuban Communist Party leaders for constructing a paternalistic narrative that the Revolution *made* Black Cubans into people (Rodríguez López 2011, 201). That is to say, any dignity Black Cubans had was owed to the state, for which uncritical loyalty and gratitude was expected in return—as if "the Revolution" was somehow a disembodied entity

apart from the people who presumably benefited from it (Farber 2011, 171). This same benevolently paternalistic discourse of top-down Black uplift emerges in dominant narratives of rumberos' journey from the slave barracks and the *solar* to the national stage.

Black Cuban Marxist scholars have coincided with Trouillot's estimation of another Caribbean island of iconic revolutionary proportion in saying that being written into the national narrative, becoming Cuban, has come with silences that reveal power inequalities (Carbonell 1961; Trouillot 2015). This is not to invisibilize the involvement and even leadership of Black people in Cuban revolutionary movements from colonialism to the present, or to diminish the radical social impact of revolutionary reforms on all poor Cubans, and Black Cubans especially. However, if to be a Cuban citizen is to be a secular-liberal subject of the nation-state, and an obedient and uncritical one at that, the Black corporeal undercommons unsettles the presupposition that this is what the formerly enslaved only ever wanted to become. A glimpse of this other horizon of belonging and being is revealed in the sense of Black pride that came from rumberos who saw their ancestral heritage as an asset for a more holistic kind of development predicated on spiritual resources that are inalienable to their bodies and shared among their kin (see chapter 4). In the pursuit of *desenvolvimiento*—a notion of development tied to spiritual obligation, potential, and interdependence—rumberos have formed a space that exceeds the nation-state's jurisdiction or definition of citizenship rights.

Rumberos have not limited themselves to the contrived stages of cultural display afforded by the state, nor have they internalized its nationalist interpellations and political ideologies wholesale. Instead, they have found ways of continually investing their labor in their own communities, from which they receive substantive dividends. In doing so, they have reclaimed sites of national spectacle and refashioned them as spaces of radical Black public assembly (see chapter 5). If not engaged in dancing for dancing's sake, following Jenny's assertion, the work of the Black corporeal undercommons might be to claim space for Black collectivity, with all its difference, and defend that ground.

These bottom-up maneuvers motion toward rumba as a way of knowing a commons wherein Black people in Havana dwell and exchange resources in self-affirming terms. Rather than striving for more inclusion in the national project to "update" and "perfect" the Cuban Revolution for the twenty-first century, rumba points us toward a sector of the Black urban

poor that maintains a critical distance from statist logics and interpellations. In motion we can feel what Hanchard calls Black quotidian politics, the politics of everyday life, that beget Black community (Hanchard 2006). These quotidian practices create other possibilities than the kind political parties or capital "P" Politics afford. They ground an investment in the kinds of aspirations that the formerly enslaved had to disavow to become Cuban (see chapter 1). These are the very kinds of yearnings I see moving diasporic Black struggles today to go beyond the state and its party politics as their political horizon.

Rumba offers much for our understanding of Black political thought and embodied worldmaking in the Americas. At stake for the hemispheric movement for Black lives is appreciating in rumba what Soyini Madison has called "radical performances that violent constraint has provoked" (2014, viii). Indeed, this seems to be the direction in which the masses are already heading when they go marching in the streets. I am thinking with the diasporic mobilizations from Minneapolis to Rio de Janeiro asserting a moral gauge more legitimate and collective power higher than state authority—the transnational movements for Black lives that defend an audaciously irreverent stance toward the kind of respectability politics that has betrayed the working-class Black masses for so long. It is no coincidence that these movements are inspired and energized by what many have anecdotally described as a spiritual calling to defend their dead. It is no wonder that protesters are called to create makeshift altars in the street where they say the names of spirits in popular prayer who cannot rest because there is more work to be done by the living. It is in this broader sense that I invoke a spirit-based politics—not as a stand-in for religion, but as a shared, historically situated understanding of who we are collectively accountable to. It is an understanding that emboldens us to make different choices and feel justified in those actions. It is a different way of validating what we are supposed to be doing in the here and now, and for whom. It is at once a political and historical orientation to the world that is not always articulated in words but made visible in motion. It is a study in how to give to ourselves what a state cannot offer us.

Rather than a clenched fist in the air as their choreographic motif, rumberos shrug their shoulders, sway, and smile to a syncopated beat. A street protest for Black life is one way to perform that the dead are not gone, that we are responsible for making their spirits manifest, and that they have a message, directions, for the living. Rumba shows us that there are other ways that may be less recognizable, illegible to the state, because they are dancing.

Knowing the Sacred Place in Rumba

"Rumba" has been used in everyday Cuban discourse to signal a diversity of music and dance styles that have taken on new meanings over time. Dating to the mid-nineteenth century, rumba was a social event distinguished by live percussion, song, and dance, giving cultural expression to a social practice that linked Africans and people of African descent across "slave," "free," and "fugitive" status in colonial western Cuba. Although colonial Spanish law, unlike the British system, did allow Catholic marriage, social associations (*cabildos de nación*) loosely grouped by language spoken or colonially defined ethnicity, and self-purchase of freedom (*coartación*), under the caste regime (*régimen de castas*), even Black people who were "free" by law suffered numerous limitations on their economic and social advancement and did much of the same sorts of work as their enslaved and fugitive counterparts in the cities.[10] It is in this context that rumba is said to have established its function as a "social chronicle of the dispossessed" (Acosta 1991, 54). To be sure, the rumba centered in this book is distinct from the commercialized and whitened versions that circulated in cabarets and ballrooms throughout North America and Europe, which may be more familiar to a wider readership due to how the word *rumba* or *rhumba* traveled outside of Cuba in the 1930s attached to a mixture of dance movements and musical arrangements that bear little resemblance to popular rumba on the island (Daniel 2009; Moore 1997).

What would become the distinguishing characteristics of rumba in Cuba were consolidated in the urban slums of the western cities of Havana and Matanzas by the formerly enslaved (Urfé 1982). Since the 1500s, Havana had been an important trade hub for the Spanish Empire through which commodities, people, and ideas circulated. This circulation exploded after the Haitian Revolution, when Cuba (alongside Brazil and Puerto Rico) became the center for world sugar production and its enslaved population rapidly increased. Cuban planters eagerly filled the void in the world market left by the neighboring former French colony and established itself as one of the most capital-intensive plantation economies in the Americas in the nineteenth century. Historians estimate that roughly one million enslaved Africans were trafficked to the island as chattel, primarily from the regions of West Africa and Congo-Angola. Even as the slave trade ceased in other parts of the Atlantic under British interdiction, in Cuba it persisted in clandestine form until 1867. This contributed to the intensive transmission of African practices, languages, and beliefs from communities often

captured en masse, and the formation of distinct cultural identities in different parts of the island. While the *régimen de castas* legally codified Cuba's majority Black and *mulato* population into a racially stratified society in which Blackness (African) and whiteness (Spanish) marked opposite poles of power and privilege (Wade 1995, 1997), at the same time, it created some paths for a degree of social mobility that were foreclosed in the British colonies, namely via "racial mixing" and the purchase of one's freedom. The sociodemographic landscape of Havana and Matanzas was dramatically transformed by the expansion of slavery; they became home to a majority Black population and several important rebellions in which cabildo membership played an instrumental role (Childs 2006; Finch 2015; Ferrer 2014). Furthermore, there was a rich tradition of *cimarronaje* (fugitivity) in both rural and urban areas. The density of *cimarrones urbanos* (urban maroons), finding refuge among their enslaved and "free" counterparts, made these Black neighborhoods into *palenques urbanos* (urban runaway communities) (Deschamps Chapeaux 1983, 6, 54). It is significant that rumba was practiced among the workers in the ports of Havana and Matanzas and was particularly associated with members of the male initiatory association Abakuá and their ritual music and dance. Indeed, international traffic in the port cities of Havana and Matanzas connected the enslaved, free, and fugitive Africans and people of African descent in a diasporic network of political thought and activity that shaped the kinds of freedom dreams that were elaborated in the Atlantic world (Dubois 2006; Scott 2018; Ferrer 2014).

It is difficult to know how rumba was played and danced in that period. Communal gatherings called rumbas were likely to host a complex of music structures and accompanying dances that served as a playful means of courtship and a corporeal means to affirm the kinds of solidarities that colonial elites bet against and actively sought to deter. These solidarities were expressed through the body in the register of pleasure and praise, and were underwritten by bonds limned in political, ancestral, and spiritual terms. In the twentieth century it became identified with three forms or music/dance subgenres, and today, *rumba* is an umbrella term that encompasses *guaguancó, yambú*, and *columbia*. Each indexes a particular historical dynamic of race, gender, sex, and class as it is rehearsed in relationship to contemporary conditions of anti-Black discrimination, heteropatriarchy, and poverty.

The first two forms, *rumba guaguancó* and *rumba yambú*, are typically danced by a male-female couple. In the popular Cuban imaginary, *rumba guaguancó* is defined as an encoded courtship dance representing the "ritualized enactment of sexual conquest" (Moore 1997, 168). The male "rooster"

(*el rumbero*) attempting to chase his "hen" (*la rumbera*) is a cultural metaphor for male sexual pursuit as danced play. Masculine movements called "*vacunaos*" (vaccinations) are the sexual advances that the woman aims to block with gestures shielding her pelvis called *botaos* (from the verb *botar*—to throw away, kick out, knock down, or bounce off) (discussed further in chapter 2). Under the most widely accepted readings of *rumba guaguancó*, "vaccination [penetration] is the goal" (Daniel 1995, 69). In contrast, the much slower *yambú*, while also described as a flirtatious dialogue between an older male and a female, is defined by the absence of vaccination (penetration) (Daniel 1994). The third subgenre, *rumba columbia*, is a competitive and typically male solo dance thought to be the result of the gender imbalance of the slave population. It is aesthetically influenced by the dances of the Abakuá, with cultural, political, and religious dimensions (described in chapters 1 and 3) that were founded by enslaved African men near the ports in the colonial era. *Rumba de cajón* (box rumba) refers to the use of box drums, like those made from the crates used to transport codfish at the ports where many Abakuá men worked. Tabletops, dresser drawers, spoons, or other objects of daily life were also improvised instruments to supplant drums when they were outlawed. Although it is squarely located within the commercial centers of the colony, unlike *cimarrón* (maroon) communities in rural Cuba, rumba has been theorized as part of the genealogy of "maroon music" because it summoned the collective action of marginalized Black people, hiding in plain sight from colonial control (Vaughan 2012; Sublette 2004).

Hampa afro-cubana: Los negros brujos: Apuntes para un estudio de etnología criminal (The Afro-Cuban underworld: The black witches: Notes for a criminal ethnological study), published in 1906, by Fernando Ortiz, known as the "Father of Cuban Anthropology," was an account of the spaces in Cuban society that bred "dangerous atavism." He trained under Italian criminologist Cesar Lombroso, and using that analytical lens, during the height of what is now called "scientific racism," he meticulously describes the amalgamation of proto-delinquent practices in the Black slums of Havana that threatened to undermine Cuba's standing among the family of modern nations, among them the *rumba de solar*. In 1924, he defined rumba in his *Glosario de afronegrismos* ([1924] 1991) as, among many things, an "obscene partner dance" evidencing the "primitive psyche" of Blacks: "violent," "lascivious," "spontaneous" (387–88). "*Todo negro nace bailador*" (all Blacks are born dancers), he asserted (Ortiz [1924] 1991, 387), a sign of their innate proximity to savagery. Ortiz's definition of rumba reflected the anxieties that he and other white creole elites shared about establishing a viable na-

tional identity with a large Black population and under the racial pressures of two US military occupations (1898–1902, 1906–1909) (Dubois and Turits 2019). US politicians who sought justification to undermine Cuban sovereignty and control its politics instituted the Platt Amendment to the Cuban Constitution in 1901. It allowed US military intervention at signs of domestic political "disorder." On both sides of the Florida Strait, elites' anxieties about a politicized and rebellious Black Cuban citizenry were projected onto the appearance of Black people dancing and playing music.

Decades later, Ortiz's writings about rumba and Black popular culture more broadly presented a revised portrayal of Blacks and promoted their "culture" as part of Cuban modernity, giving rise to "Afro-Cuban studies." Like Ortiz's contemporary in the US academy, Franz Boas, his scholarship emphasized culture so as to debunk the theory of biological determinism to which he had once held. Emerging from that fraught intellectual genealogy, rumba came to be understood as an expression of cultural hybridity: a mixture or blend of different cultural forms primarily deriving from Africa and Europe. As in other Latin American nations founded on racial slavery, the discourse of cultural blending promoted by the intelligentsia, instantiated in Ortiz's *ajiaco* (stew) metaphor (1940), served a nationalist mission of ostensible inclusion and harmonious blending, and legitimized the myth of "racial democracy" (Freyre 1946). This myth strengthened an ideology of unity within national identity while simultaneously negating the pervasiveness of historical patterns of racial exclusion and hierarchy and downplaying structural racism, even while it ostensibly sought to upend them.

Robin D. Moore's (1994) critical analysis of Ortiz's body of work highlights how characterizations of Black artistic practice have long been embedded in social relations of power that give race meaning in Cuba. "Rumba is perhaps best understood as composed of both specific associations with music and dance styles and broad, historically derived associations with Cuba's black underclass, their lifestyles, attitudes, and culture" (1997, 169). He states that rumba circulates as a racial signifier, such that its invocation can perform both derogatory anti-Black sentiment and oppositional racial pride and belonging. Stuart Hall's claim that "race is the modality in which class is lived" speaks to the racialization of class in neighborhoods where rumbas are formed in Havana (Hall et al. 1978, 394). In short, rumba's Blackness indexes a lower urban class position mapped on to a racial geography rooted in slavery. It is either demeaned or defended on that basis.

After the 1959 triumph of the Cuban Revolution, radical changes in the political, economic, and social fabric of the country allowed poor and

working-class Cubans unprecedented access to housing, education, health, land, and professional opportunities. Black Cubans, historically overrepresented in the lower socioeconomic sectors, experienced measurably significant gains in terms of life expectancy, quality of life, housing, schooling, and social mobility as a result (de la Fuente 1995). In turn, rumba went from being a social chronicle of the dispossessed to a social chronicle of the liberated (from capitalist oppression) via the triumph of socialism. Rumba gained a reputation for being a cultural symbol for revolutionary values of integration and egalitarianism (Daniel 1991, 1995, 2009).

The undeniable gains in a range of arenas that Black Cubans experienced due to the Revolution's restructuring of social and economic institutions help explain their widespread support of the project of Cuban socialism and their respect for Fidel Castro as a leader who addressed issues of poverty and national independence. However, an initial period of lively debate and cultural production that addressed racial issues was marked by US-backed military invasion, sabotage, and economic blockade, helping prompt a shutdown of virtually all critique; in 1961, Fidel Castro declared that racism had been eliminated by the state. A united front against US imperialism became paramount in the Cold War context of US aggression; this demand built on the nineteenth-century independence discourse of racial unity, encapsulated by the slogan "Not Blacks, not whites, only Cubans." Thereafter, claims that Black artists, intellectuals, and activists made about the continued salience of race, reproduction of structural racism, or impact of racial prejudice on their daily lives was actively silenced through government censorship, and suppressed as divisive and counterrevolutionary (Benson 2016).[11] However, despite Fidel Castro's proclamation, so-called color-blind socialism did not eradicate racism; nor did it make Black consciousness obsolete (Clealand 2017). The mid-1960s to the mid-1980s were characterized by "inclusionary discrimination" (Sawyer 2005, 19) that encompassed both social advances and restrictions, material improvements and cultural censorship.

The Cuban state declared itself officially atheist from the outset of the revolution. Religion was regarded as an "opiate of the masses," a maladaptation to capitalism, and thus no longer necessary under Cuban socialism. The state made religious affiliation of any kind grounds for exclusion from becoming a Communist Party member, for aspiring to certain professions, or to holding a higher government office, although this restriction fell more heavily on practitioners of African-inspired religions. Responding to the dogmatic Sovietization of every social realm during the 1970s, at

the same time that Fidel Castro declared Cuba an "African Latin" nation, practitioners of African-inspired religions were criminalized and violently persecuted, and religious activities were restricted and stigmatized (Ayorinde 2004; Berry 2010). This pushed African-inspired religious practices further underground. Religiosos, especially those seeking professional advancement in state-subsidized sectors, had to hide their initiatory beads (*collares*), refrain from dressing in white during the year-long initiation, and conduct ceremonies clandestinely, among other restrictions, so as to not jeopardize their employment.

This racial democratic rhetoric and official atheism proved less tenable in the 1990s when the economic crisis prompted by the fall of the Soviet Union, which had subsidized Cuba's economy, and exacerbated by the US embargo severely limited the expansion of opportunities for Black Cubans. The "Special Period" of the 1990s laid bare the contradictions of officially silenced forms of ongoing racial discrimination and racial inequality. Large-scale economic collapse and severe food shortages made Cuban households more reliant on remittances from abroad. The saying "*hay que tener fé*" (you have to have faith) and all will be well, once a revolutionary slogan signaling that people were working in the underground to topple the US-backed Batista government, was now turned upside down to signal a bitter reminder of their failed hopes for what that revolution would bring (Hernández-Reguant 2002). *Fé* became an acronym for "*Familia en el Extranjero*" (family abroad). Given the early flight of the largely white Cuban elite and professional class, white Cubans who remained had greater access to this new economic lifeline that was now indispensable for economic survival.

In this dire context, many orthodoxies of the past were revised. Among them, the state shifted from sugar export to tourism as the major source of foreign exchange and created a dual currency system to facilitate foreign investment in strategic sectors. This resulted in a two-tiered system of spaces and goods to which only foreigners, or those few with exchangeable currency, had access. Additionally, recognizing its limited ability to meet popular material needs, the state revised the constitution in 1991, declaring itself secular rather than atheist. It thereby officially relinquished religious affiliation as a legitimate basis for overt discrimination and marginalization, even as old prejudices remained intact (Ayorinde 2004).

At the same time, the commodification of expressions of Black popular culture staged as a secular national resource played a key role in Cuba's post-Soviet economic future. The early revolutionary era of rumba's institutionalization lay the groundwork for its commodification in a new cultural

market for foreigners. For religiosos seeking formal employment in the tourist sector, adopting a secularist discourse became a rubric for professional advancement and was advantageous for seizing economic opportunities (Hagedorn 2001; Ayorinde 2004; Daniel 2010). Therefore, folkloric performances became one of the few means for Black Cubans to circumvent the "tourist apartheid" created by the dual currency system (Roland 2011, 67; Sawyer 2005, 76).

By and large, touristic representations of rumba reinscribe a flattened image of Black people dancing and drumming, reducing rumba practitioners to their caricatured circulation in the popular imaginary. Even while rumba has been taken up as a secular symbol of national identity in the era of cultural tourism, it is still regarded as "*una cosa de negros* (a Black thing) and disparaged given racialized stereotypes that link the practice with *el bajo mundo* (the low life), excessive alcohol use, and violence" (Bodenheimer 2013, 177). That is to say, class is racialized to such an extent that dominant sectors have viewed rumba as the cultural expression of poverty. To that effect, rumberas and rumberos carry the projections of Blackness as delinquent, unruly, hypersexual, hedonist, and humble. This unsavory reputation has made rumba a paradox for Black identity politics and, specifically, for an "Afro-Cuban cultural movement" that seeks to critique and dismantle those very stereotypes (Berry 2016; de la Fuente 2008). Contemporary discourses around rumba emphatically expose the enduring entanglement of race, gender, and class oppression in socialist Cuba.

When I formally approached Geovani del Pino, the artistic director of Yoruba Andabo, to ask for his consent to include his ensemble in my study, he said that he was averse to foreign researchers but would grant me permission for four reasons: because I'm young, I'm Black, I'm religiosa, and we have a mutual friend from the US (also an anthropologist) who is very dear to him. His response gave a clear indication of what aspects of my identity he deemed most relevant, which in turn illuminates his own practices of self-making and how he positioned himself (or not) in relation to others. Notably, his race and his faith were paramount for ultimately deciding to talk to this wide-eyed young foreigner who was becoming an anthropologist. The questions I asked (and learned not to ask) over the years, as much as their responses, were necessarily informed by my "passport privilege," the extent of my body's racial interpellation, my gender expression, and the sacred meanings assigned to my subjectivity as a descendant of Africans enslaved in Cuba and kin to a family of stone (albeit based in NYC). Reflexive about my unique positionality in these exchanges with

rumberas and rumberos, I came to know rumba differently. Paramount to that understanding was its sacred underpinnings.

Religiosos predominate among the ranks of professional rumberos. As musicologist and rumba promoter Ned Sublette asserts, "Almost all rumberos today practice Santería, and images and quotes from its santos appear in the text they sing" (2004, 267). Likewise, studies tracing the language of ritual songs to Africa, such as those of the Abakuá confraternities housed in cabildos to which rumberos have historically belonged, and then locating their traces in rumba music recordings, have made the case for the embeddedness of the sacred within this ostensibly secular Cuban popular cultural form. Documenting the "African roots" of Cuban popular music through etymological reconstruction of song lyrics has been one way to make the place of the sacred visible within Black cultural practices that have been officially categorized as secular (Miller 2000).

Nevertheless, a common sense persists, and official discourse insists, that rumba is a secular activity. This common sense is reflected in state policies and the everyday language that rumberos themselves deploy. Despite the importance of religious affiliation in Geovani's decisions concerning his relationship to my project, professional rumberos like himself routinely adopt a secularist discourse—"folklore is folklore; religion is religion"—as a rubric of professionalism, and as a protection from state interference, in exchange for a monthly salary paid by the state. Rather than take the connection between rumba and African diasporic religious practice as purely circumstantial, or make a point about its African roots, this book reveals why the sacred is important for situating this embodied practice within a larger Black emancipatory imaginary that is adjusting to the diminishing gains of secularism in a weakened welfare state. For rumberos, faith was key to self-authorizing the practices they devised on the ground so as to move beyond/around/under/through persistent socioeconomic constraints. Likewise, within Cuba, predominantly white writers since the twentieth century helped caricature rumberos as "salt-of-the-earth Black protagonists" or the humble poor (*los humildes*) in the cultural drama of an anti-US-empire Revolution (Schmidt 2016, 164), who were devoid of political and economic agency. To leave faith out of my analysis of rumba would be to deny a key framework that Black subjects use to understand themselves, interpret their conditions, direct their choices, and legitimate their claims in particular ways. Rumberos are strategically and consciously drawing on and gesturing toward shared understandings of the sacred in their performances and in their connections to each other to mediate this moment of economic change.

I.3 A *religiosa* cheers at a Yoruba Andabo performance at El Palacio de la Rumba. Photo by author.

As transnational feminist M. Jacqui Alexander (2005) reminds us, if we are serious about respecting Black subjects as producers of knowledge about their lives, we have something to learn from their "pedagogies of the sacred." Alexander calls this a "spirit-based politics." Her insistence on the interconnectedness of the spiritual and the political is characteristic of the Black feminist tradition that guides my theorization of the Black corporeal undercommons. Drawing specifically on Audre Lorde's ([1978] 1984) formulation of the erotic as the sensual bridge that connects the political and the spiritual, Lyndon Gill (2018) poignantly names the "political-sensual-spiritual" as his "principle interpretive posture" (xxv), thus making it possible to interpret, for instance, Black popular art and queer activism as an "eros driven critique of the nation" (16). Musing on these submerged connections, a metaphor for the underwater unity of the Caribbean archipelago itself, Gill reframes spirituality as, "at its core, a desire for a metasystem of accountability and larger continuity of existence" (Brathwaite 1975; Gill 2018, 10). My ethnography assumes such a political-sensual-spiritual posture and suggests that this move brings me in closer alignment with rumberos themselves. Therefore, this Black feminist orientation to anthro-

pological study, one which refuses mind-body, spirit-politics divisions, is indispensable to my ethnographic rendering of this Black community of practice. It is key to understanding how those formed by rumba analyze the social, critically engage with a nation-state haunted both by slavery and Soviet orthodoxy, and fashion other systems of care and accountability that lie outside state jurisdiction.

The African diasporic sacred, as a vitally embodied epistemology, is also a bridge that connects my project to Black performance studies, allowing me to treat embodied articulations as sites of social theorization. A nonverbal correction given on the dance floor, a collective shift of weight, a reverential embrace, or a furtive glance are respected analytically as strategic exchanges between subjects deserving of critical engagement on their own terms. Learning to move and think through rumba was for me a means to better understand Black experience in Cuba at the specific political and economic conjuncture of the Raúl Castro presidency (2008–2018), when the national reforms that promised to secure the Revolution's socialist future in effect compromised the kind of guarantees that the Black working class had relied on.

Updating the Revolution

Whether Cuban society was changing for the better or for worse was an active debate during the period this book chronicles. The start of my research occurred just a year after Fidel Castro, the leader of the 26th of July Movement (Movimiento 26 de julio, or M-26-7) that overthrew the US-backed Batista regime in 1959, stepped down as president after nearly fifty years in office, due to declining health. When Raúl Castro, his younger brother, stepped in to fill the post, people wondered how the country would shift. The viability of the Soviet model, with its top-down, centralized, and dogmatic forms of control, had been challenged by the demands of increasing incorporation into global circuits of capital. Under Raúl, the Cuban state shifted gears to approximate a "Sino-Vietnamese" model of state capitalism: it retained a powerful single-party state that controls strategic sectors of the economy, while sharing other sectors with domestic and foreign private capitalists (Farber 2013). Raúl stated in his first speech as acting president in 2007: "Revolution means having a sense of our moment in history, it means changing all that ought to be changed." As pledged, adjustments were on the horizon.

The strategic plan issued by the PCC, titled *Los Lineamientos de la política económica y social del partido y la revolución* (The guidelines of economic and social policy of the party and the revolution, 2011), or *Los Lineamientos* (*The Guidelines*) for short, laid out a piecemeal yet significant path toward economic reform. *The Guidelines* prompted the implementation of 130 new policies, the publication of 344 new legal regulations, the modification of 555 existing regulations, and the elimination of 684 regulations that thereafter characterized Raúl Castro's stamp on Cuban history (Castro Ruz 2016). The discourse issuing from the PCC, also headed by Raúl, asserted that these adjustments aimed "to perfect Cuban socialism" for the twenty-first century. With "perfecting" came the solicitation of foreign investment, the expansion of the private market, the adoption of elements of economic rationality to increase "discipline" and "efficiency," and with that, the consolidation and normalization of economic inequality. My eighteen months of sustained doctoral fieldwork in Havana from 2012 to 2014 coincided with the launch of Raúl's *actualización* (update) to the economic model of the Revolution. Five postdoctoral research trips between 2016 and 2018 bore witness to its denouement. Fidel Castro's death in 2016 sealed Raúl's presidency as the symbolic end of one era and the birth of another.

Legal reforms at the national level were articulated alongside changes in international law. Raúl's pledge to bring change to the country was pronounced the same year as the "Law of Historical Memory" was passed in Spain. Under the 2007 law, any Cuban national able to trace a grandparent or great-grandparent in their family to Spain was eligible to establish citizenship based on jus sanguinis, the right of the blood. White Cubans capitalizing on their new birthright to dual citizenship had an advantage as the reforms took effect. The Spanish Consulate in Havana received more than 25,000 applications within the first months of taking effect. They were the descendants of an estimated one million Spaniards who emigrated to Cuba at beginning of the twentieth century, including Fidel and Raúl's father. Of the 500,000 applicants worldwide, 40.7 percent were Cubans, most of whom were phenotypically white (Hansing 2017, 340). Those of Spanish descent with an EU passport found a slew of possibilities for class mobility, including ease of travel abroad without a visa; the option to legally emigrate to Europe while continuing to own property in Cuba, work abroad, and send remittances to their families still living on the island; and the ability to enroll their children in private international schools once restricted to the families of diplomats (Bastian 2018). On the day the first passports were issued in February of 2009, recipients were quoted as being grateful

that their ancestors had given them this opportunity, and shouting "Long live Spain!" (Israel 2009), words that would have been socially scorned in the days of revolutionary fervor under Fidel. When the first Cuban to be granted dual citizenship enthusiastically readied himself to retrace the voyage across the Atlantic that his grandfather made in 1916, Cubans of African descent braced for a reversion of different kind. By and large, Black Cubans experienced the "update" as a regression to pre-revolutionary racialized class stratification, logics of competition, and individualistic values that disproportionately favored the already structurally advantaged.

Cubans of African descent had been among the biggest beneficiaries of the Revolution's centralized reordering of society in the 1960s under Fidel. The policy changes of the revolutionary regime, which overhauled the logic of supply and demand to nationalize the productive sectors of the economy, greatly benefited Cuba's poor, among whom Blacks were disproportionately represented. Later, under a survival mode of operation in the 1990s—called the Período Especial en Tiempo de Paz (Special Period [of Wartime Austerity] in Times of Peace)—everyday Cubans needed to constantly *luchar* (to struggle, to fight) to find alternative avenues to acquire hard currency or hustle by any means to survive (Hernández-Reguant 2010). Economic reforms to reopen and fortify the tourist industry resulted in moderate allowances for joint ventures and family-run private businesses, such as hotels, small *paladares* (home-based restaurants), and *casas particulares* (room rentals). As Daniel (2010) notes, in 1991, reports indicated that tourism had even returned to its pre-revolutionary levels, when Cuba was considered the US's backyard playground in the 1950s (Economist Intelligence Unit 1991, 21). Scholars have marked this post-1990 period as one of "recreating racism" or the "erosion of racial equality" in revolutionary Cuba (de la Fuente 2001b, 2001a; Blue 2007; Zurbano 2013). During this time, which some economists refer to as the late socialist era, severe material scarcity and socioeconomic inequalities that prior reforms had sought to upend resurged. The term *tourist apartheid* describes how flows of capital were consolidated in the hands of white Cubans while the forms of *la lucha* practiced by Black Cubans lacking access to remittances were disproportionately criminalized (Fusco 1998; de la Fuente 2001b; Sawyer 2005; Roland 2013). Few Black Cubans had the means to establish tourist-facing businesses of their own. Moreover, they were systematically kept out of more lucrative jobs in the state-run or joint-venture tourism industry on the pretext that foreigners preferred contact with white Cubans or that Black Cubans simply lacked the "good presence" (*buena presencia*) required for such professions (de la

Fuente 2001a). At the same time, a stigma was disproportionately attached to the informal way Black people "hustled" to make a living, labeled *jineterismo* and widely associated with prostitution.

Black people gained limited entry to spaces of commerce as the folkloric entertainment that performed Cuban cultural authenticity, or as Daniel aptly puts it, as "a commodity literally 'in motion'" (2010, 21). Dance floors became market spaces for erotic economies in what Jafari Allen has called "the triangle trade of desire" (2011, 160). Faced with constrained socioeconomic possibilities, men and women of color relied on their ability to perform racialized and gendered tropes in exchange for foreign currency. Blackness functioned as a sign of cultural authenticity, and professional rumba performance satisfied the tropicalist expectations of international consumers (Jottar 2013). In effect, the spotlight on rumba in state tourism coincided with the increased visibility of gendered anti-Blackness and racialized class restratification in revolutionary Cuba.

The state ignored or rationalized these changes in the social fabric of the Revolution—granting impunity for overt forms of anti-Blackness and profiteering—as necessary evils to survive against all odds and protect the revolutionary project from foreign incursion. Those who worked in legal family-owned businesses operated with a "*doble moral*": on the one hand their economic activities were encouraged by the cash-strapped state, but they were also stigmatized due to the association between private enterprise and capitalist greed (Bastian 2018).

In contrast to Fidel, Raúl Castro's leadership has been described as one of "managerial practicality, dispensing with some anti-market orthodoxies of old" (Bustamante 2018). Notably, mass layoffs in the public sector were paired with the promotion of self-employment, and the significant reduction of state subsidies coincided with an aggressive courting of foreign investment. Hope Bastian (2018) notes in her ethnography on Cubans' everyday adjustments to the economic reforms, "From 2008–2011, state spending for social welfare decreased by $386.2 million" (13). The PCC framed these changes not as a turn toward neoliberalism, but as needed "updates" to the Revolution's economic model.

The update required that Cuban citizens revise their understanding of the state's role, change their "mentalities" and behaviors, and adjust their relationship to each other accordingly (Pañellas Álvarez 2015). In order to relieve the "burden" of the "bloated" state payroll (Frank 2010), Cubans were encouraged to become small, private-business owners (*cuentapropistas*) and entrepreneurs (*emprendedores*). *Granma*, the official newspaper of

the PCC, steadily covered the private sector, echoing the broader state discourse promoting the value of individual initiative and personal responsibility, counting on yourself or working on your own behalf (*por su propia cuenta*), rather than for the government. In a special series on the emergent sector (*Granma* 2010), a prominent segment about self-employment (*trabajo por cuenta propria*) boasted the headline, "*La cuenta propia, no la ajena*," which roughly translates as "Self-employment, don't miss out!"[12] Listed in the newspaper were the 178 new forms of legal private occupations, including eighty-three that allowed one to hire their own employees. While these were relatively minor occupations and did not include wholesale activities, people were allowed to hold licenses for multiple occupations at once and thus multiply their revenue streams. Within six months, all licensed occupations were allowed to hire their own employees. In the emergent private sector, *cuentapropistas* would have to answer to their bosses, and those bosses to their investors, all responding to competition, which would ostensibly ensure quality of service, diversity of consumer options, and increase opportunities for consumption for all. In exchange for their salary (determined by what the market would bear), employees were expected to be obedient and submissive to their boss (Pañellas Álvarez 2015, 176). This reproduced relationships of power and exploitation that had been deemed antithetical to the achievement of human dignity under socialism, as stated in the Cuban Constitution (Bastian 2018, 10, 144).

Between 2010 and 2011, according to the Cuban National Statistics Office, the number of private-sector workers rose from 147,400 to 391,500 (Bastian 2018, 12). Given the lingering mistrust around what official registration would entail in the long term, it is safe to assume that the actual number of people informally working in the private sector was much higher. In political speeches and state-controlled mass media, Cubans were ordered to let go of the "laziness" enabled by the inefficiencies and "paternalism" of the prior system and its "unnecessary" state subsidies. Through taxation on official licensing, income, sales, and social security, private-sector actors would contribute their fair share to el pueblo (the people). To realize the projected economic development of the nation, citizens were encouraged to undergo self-reform and become more ambitious, self-sufficient economic agents. While this would be called *neoliberal* in other contexts, that term was not part of the official discourse (Bastian 2018, 7).

The nationwide call for personal reform eerily recalled the 1960s, when Ernesto "Che" Guevara established a template for revolutionary self-making in the figure of "El hombre nuevo" (The New Man) (Guevara [1965]

1967). The central figure of the 1959 Revolution was implicitly a man without class position, racial identification, or religious affiliation. The New Man was driven by concern for the collective good rather than material incentives. His cultivation was supported by new social programs that sought to expunge perceived "impurities" from the body politic. As other scholars have noted, those programs disproportionately targeted Black men and women labeled "deviant" for their racial consciousness and religious affiliation (Benson 2016; Ayorinde 2004). In the case of Black people who were same-gender-loving, Allen asserts, "gender inappropriateness is [was] charged" (2011, 106).

The New Man 2.0 is the term I use to refer to the central actor of the post-Fidel reforms; it similarly implies a racialized and gendered ideal type. He is the entrepreneur featured in local and international media stories that characterize Cuba's move toward national development by focusing on personal drive, hard work, and innovation. In her ethnography of neoliberalism in the Caribbean, Carla Freeman identifies the entrepreneur as the embodiment par excellence of neoliberal reworkings of selfhood in its image (2014). In a similar vein, the self-employed entrepreneur became the new noble revolutionary figure to "perfect" Cuban socialism in the 2010s. Able to generate his own income, the New Man 2.0 did not rely on government rations and thus relieved the state of the "burden" of his welfare. He absorbed risk, wielded technology to compete responsibly in the market, and employed other Cubans to work under his supervision. He knew how to effectively govern his subordinates and provided for his family by responsibly competing with other men in the global marketplace. The *cuentapropista*, as the name suggests, counts on himself.

Notably, this idealized entrepreneurial subject was overwhelmingly white and male. As Bastian (2018) reports, increasingly segregated social networks have led to an overrepresentation of white male, professional, and middle-aged employers in the private sector, a group largely unfettered by labor laws and regulations as they exploit the labor of others. These entrepreneurs either had family abroad, dual citizenship, or were the "son or grandson of" someone with a "historic salary" (middle-class professionals who were allowed to keep their pre-revolutionary salaries to mitigate the brain drain in the 1960s) (Bastian 2018). Alternatively, they were the "son or grandson of" people in leadership positions within the state apparatus, and therefore had what Bastian (2018) calls "revolutionary cultural capital," and thus were put in charge of large-scale joint ventures with foreign investors. In both cases, they were the progeny of those Spaniards whose

race licensed them to travel on the decks of the ships crossing the Atlantic, not packed like sardines in their bowels. In these New Man 2.0 discourses, the successful capitalization of neocolonial structures of racial hierarchies, generational wealth, and transnational social networks of access to capital were recoded as virtuous revolutionary business acumen.

Raúl's campaign proved effective in addressing Cubans' consumer desires, fueled by their exposure to the services and goods that tourists could afford, and the agency they wielded, when visiting the island. As Daybel Pañellas Álvarez found in her study of the psychological impact of the reforms, interest in the private sector is related to the sense of autonomy (from the state) that it offers and that many youth crave (Pañellas Álvarez 2015, 176; Bastian 2018, 142). Cuban youth had grown increasingly disenchanted with the project of the socialist revolution due to the devastating economic crises. If they didn't have the means to leave (officially considered as defection), they found ways to survive either through extralegal forms of "struggle" (*la lucha*) or remittances (Hernández-Reguant 2010). Younger generations of Cubans grew cautiously optimistic about how the emergent economy might improve the quality of life for those who chose to stay. Renewed hope on the part of white Cuban youth was no doubt afforded by family networks abroad, inherited resources, and racial privilege.

Black youth, on the other hand, had compounded reasons to feel frustrated by their limited prospects of social mobility in a plan that normalized conspicuous consumption as moral and rationalized the individualistic market logics and racialized inequality it represents as "progressive" Cuban socialism. This neoliberal discourse diminished the fact that families of African descent were disproportionately dependent on state subsidies due to long-standing structural inequalities. Lack of large monetary inheritances or gifts for startup funds, property ownership, and exclusion from lucrative social networks means that they were systematically least able to insert themselves into the emerging economy and become new New Men and Women. *The Guidelines* effectively put white families at a structural advantage in terms of access to the funds and resources needed for successful entrepreneurship, creating a new consumer class from which Black Cubans were systematically excluded.

Understandably, when the Ministry of Culture officially recognized rumba as national patrimony in 2012 and state media presented it as part of the government's actions to align with the 2011 United Nation's Year of the Afrodescendant for the benefit of people of African descent, young rumberos viewed the designation cynically. As with previous moments of promoting

rumba during times of political and economic crisis, the 2012 nomination of rumba as national patrimony meant that rumba groups like Yoruba Andabo received invitations to perform in more venues throughout the city. However, this heightened emphasis on rumba in the Cuban tourist sector did not bring the kind of material benefits for Black performers themselves that citizens were being encouraged to seize in the marketplace. Rumberos' salaries did not increase even as the cost of living in the capital rose.

When I asked Jenny's goddaughter Tailyn why she thought the genre was receiving a renewed degree of attention from the state at that moment, she rubbed her thumb and pointer finger together and replied, "Because it's good for business." She noted the widespread frustration her peers felt about the struggle of Black cultural producers to benefit from their labor within the public (subsidized)- and private (unsubsidized)-market channels alike. We spoke in Morcilla's living room after one of my lessons as she prepared lunch for Jenny. Tailyn Duperey was a member of the all-female group Rumba Morena, which performed at El Callejón de Hamel (Hamel Alleyway), a venue in the heart of Centro Habana's Cayo Hueso neighborhood that hosted a rumba every Sunday. Morcilla also worked there. El Callejón is an independently managed outdoor performance space and art center, set between walls painted with murals that refer to African-diasporic religious aesthetics. It caters to visitors who wish to experience "Afro-Cuba" in situ (Allen 2011). Performers make money by selling CDs to tourists after their shows. But, Tailyn explained, such sales were never guaranteed and had to be split between all nine members. Sometimes the tourists would load back on their buses without purchasing anything, content with the video and images they captured on their phones as their souvenir. These losses were even more pronounced for groups like hers who did not have access to the same amount of performance venues as their male-led counterparts. From Tailyn's vantage point, the remedy to her dissatisfaction was not resolved through more "access and inclusion" to the private market. Instead, she was skeptical of whose interests private ventures ultimately served. The state's championing of entrepreneurialism stigmatized those, like Tailyn, who doubted its potential as "lazy" and stuck in the past. Ignoring rampant race- and gender-based employment discrimination and the uneven benefits of tourism, failure to thrive in the updated economy, as it was in the Special Period, could be attributed to deep-seated "culture of poverty" rationales rooted in essentialized notions of Black inferiority (de la Fuente 2001b).

After Raúl Castro and Barack Obama's historic simultaneous announcement in 2014 of imminent diplomatic normalization between the two

countries, and Obama's impactful visit to the island in 2016 (the first sitting US president to do so since 1928), international news agencies began reporting on racial inequality in the private sector. In a 2017 report by Public Radio International (PRI), "Havana's Business Boom Exposes a Stark Racial Divide," Cuban historian Alejandro de la Fuente stated, "The lack of Black business owners is leading to a stark economic divide between white and Black Cubans, something the socialist government worked hard to erase" (D. Fernandes 2017). Indeed, save for a few exceptions, well known in part because of their rarity, successful Black business owners are few and far between (Rodriguez 2015). Following the lead of anti-racist scholar-activists relentlessly organizing within and beyond state institutions in Cuba, social scientists on both sides of the Florida Strait have taken to studying the worsening of pre-established systems of racialized class stratification (Carrazana Fuentes et al. 2011; Hansing and Hoffmann 2019; de la Fuente 2019). The legal freedom to employ other Cubans (outside of immediate family) in private businesses expanded what Black Cuban anti-racist activist Roberto Zurbano has termed "(neo-)racism" (2011). Although statistical data regarding employment discrimination is difficult to obtain, the language common in employment ads was telling. The return to the coded language of "good presence" was indicative of overt racially biased selection.

While editorials have clearly identified racism, and to a lesser degree sexism, as deleterious consequences of Cuba's market reforms, less ethnographic attention has been brought to bear on how both racism and sexism mutually constitute lived experiences of class oppression on the ground. This intersectional lens allows us to better appreciate the significance of the surge of ads looking for wait staff in revolico.com (the Cuban Craigslist) for the new private restaurants often explicitly specifying that only young white women or *trigueñas* (olive-skin brunettes) need apply, thus reinforcing Eurocentric standards of feminine beauty. In his *New York Times* op-ed, de la Fuente (2019) cites a prime example of the openly sexist and racist job ads that circulate with impunity: "Seeking qualified experienced personnel: waitstaff (good-looking blond or brunette women, who speak foreign languages) and security and protection (strong men of color)." Notably, the growing demand for a burly Black man to flank private businesses and, essentially, keep Black patrons out, epitomized the return to prerevolutionary practices of de facto segregation and their gendered maintenance. The different constraints and opportunities under which Black women and men labor in the emerging market highlight the gendered nature of the racialized employment barriers and tracking that peso-poor

people contended with more broadly post-Fidel. When comparing the differential returns for their labor in updating Cuba, what was "good for business," using Tailyn's words, wasn't necessarily good for all.

Defending Rumba in Havana contributes to our understanding of this moment of post-Fidel "neo-racism" by turning to the analytical frameworks, historical referents, and embodied strategies that poor Black subjects use to negotiate gendered and racialized expectations and exclusions arising from Cuba's development schemes. The "sense of our moment in history" that Raúl referenced in his inaugural speech about the course the Revolution needed to take was quite different from the one rumberas and rumberos shared. Jenny's historical framing was felt in the piercing look she delivered at me with her chastisement: "And as Black women, we have to give ourselves value! Because no one else gives us value." With it, she gestured toward a specific kind of racialized *and* gendered injury that deprived Black women of more dignified life chances at the very moment of Cuban socialism's proclaimed "perfecting." These differential orientations to the history of Cuban nation-building correspond to unique senses about what conditions needed to change in the present and why, and from where power could be derived to legitimize those assertions. A Black feminist lens is paramount for teasing apart the gendered specificity of the corrections, recollections, frustrations, and aspirations conveyed to me by the people I danced alongside.

Worth Defending

"La Gozadera" by Yoruba Andabo was the rumba anthem during this period of socioeconomic change. Yoruba Andabo performances were events that Black inner-city youth in the capital flocked to at every opportunity. Just as the lyrics suggested, "When Yoruba Andabo hits the dance floor, you have to run, you have to run [to get there]." Word spread quickly about the song from those who experienced Yoruba Andabo in person, whether at their weekly matinee at a nightclub in Centro Habana or at a post-ceremony party at a *casa-templo* (household-temple) in neighborhoods throughout the city. It became a hit on the streets well before the release of the group's 2015 recording that would blast on the radio, out of bicitaxis, and at house parties throughout the country. The chorus rang, "*Pon te pa lo tuyo que hasta tú tienes problemas!*" which roughly translates as "Mind your business because even you have problems!" These lyrics may have spoken to how people jealously measured themselves up against others in a heightened competitive

I.4 Yoruba Andabo performance at La Tropical. *From left to right:* Lázaro Monteagudo Lara, Jennyselt Galata, Ronald González Cobas, and Geovani del Pino. Photo by author.

society. However, the reason for the song's popularity, I argue, cannot be derived from the words alone. Embodied methodologies and performance analysis allow us to understand how embodied practice produces its own meaning that, especially in Cuba where state surveillance looms large, necessarily exceeds what is spoken (Guerra 2014).

Geovani's wife was preparing coffee for the group while Yerilú and I sat together to talk at the kitchen table. Yerilú had joined Yoruba Andabo just four months before. She grew up dancing in the storied *comparsa* La Jardinera of the Jesús María neighborhood in Old Havana. Although the comparsas bear the stigma of the same racialized stereotypes assigned to rumba, she took pride in being the descendant of generations of musicians, dancers, and singers who kept alive the traditions of the cabildo processions started by Africans during *el tiempo de la colonia* (colonial times). She excitedly showed me pictures on her phone of her baby girl, who she would likewise raise to carry on her family's cabildo legacy. After slowly moving up the ranks in the comparsa, she eventually joined the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional de Cuba (the National Folkloric Dance Company of Cuba, CFN).

Yerilú attributed her decision to ultimately leave the CFN to her frustration as a new mom and as a dutiful "daughter" of orishas. The demands of working for the state folkloric company left little time and resources to care for her daughter or work ceremonies in her ritual community. She was honored to have been given the opportunity to belong to such an important cultural institution and recalled how she developed as a performing artist on the way to achieving the status of principal singer. She was even able to choreograph parts of the repertory and was proud to have left her mark. But she also felt stunted artistically as she was required to perform in a formulaic fashion, making monotonous what was otherwise a dynamic creative process in ceremony. "In the Conjunto they always ask you to do the same thing. . . . And I realized that I wasn't advancing."

She vividly recounted the day she knew she needed to change professional course to have desenvolvimiento in her life. She was conducting a ritual feeding of her orisha around the time of the anniversary of her initiation into Lucumí priesthood. A message from Elegguá came demanding that she dedicate herself to performing for religious ceremonies or she would lose her voice and never sing again. Leaving the CFN to join Yoruba Andabo, another state-subsidized ensemble, after returning from maternity leave, represented a way to still work as a professional artist while heeding Elegguá's call to also prioritize serving her stone family. It was Yoruba Andabo's reputation for being active ritual performers and respected within her religious community that convinced her that the more holistically beneficial path to which she was being divinely guided lay with them.

Although it was delivered in the form of a threat, the message she took away was that devotion to religious labor was the key to saving both the integrity of her voice and her family. Her sense of spiritual and financial well-being was intimately tied to the claim divine forces had on her body, causing her to take the message seriously. "Do you know what I feel every time I sing? It's like a magnetic field around my body. A field in which the only thing that exists is the percussion, the dancer, and myself. A field that covers us, that protects us." Performing with Yoruba Andabo, Yerilú felt her body situated in the same realm of refuge that her ritual kin create for themselves during ceremony in Matanzas, where her family was from. The feeling of protection was what rumba and ceremony formed for her. It also connected her to a social network linking Black neighborhoods throughout the city and new possibilities to care for herself and her family. She'd later invite me to one such ceremony where she was hired to perform as an *akpwón* (lead singer), so I could see, and hopefully feel, what she described.

Similar invitations by other members of Yoruba Andabo would lead me to travel to neighborhoods across Havana where the protective and connective choreo/geography Yerilú attested to was also formed. Directions were always given to me using the public bus routes, so that is how I primarily traveled. Although waiting times were long and unpredictable, causing overcrowding, it was the most affordable way to move throughout the city and therefore the way that was most familiar to them. That is how I came to know coordinates of the capital city far off the tourist map.

The bus stop nearest to where Lekiam Aguilar, a percussionist, lived in Pogolotti was across from a store dedicated to selling the all-white clothing required for the yearlong process of Lucumí priesthood initiation. Pogolotti was a historically working-class Black neighborhood in the municipality of Marianao, renowned for its religiosos. Its reputation grew after the publication of now canonical texts written on the subject by Cuban ethnographer Lydia Cabrera, who conducted her research there in the 1930s and 1940s (Cabrera 1940, 1948, 1954, 1957). Cabrera came from an elite white Havana family and was first exposed to Black culture through her servants, and in particular, her nanny. I found myself walking along the same blocks as Cabrera once did some eighty years later to also conduct ethnography. But rather than being connected through servitude, Lekiam, a drummer in Yoruba Andabo, and I were related by faith. My distant cousin was initiated as a Lucumí priestess in his casa-templo years prior. Lekiam and others in his blood and stone family in Pogolotti taught her husband the sacred *batá* drums, and taught her the ritual songs that she would later perform as an akpwón for ceremonies in New York City.

When I arrived at the door, a dark-skinned bald woman answered. Her face was full of worry. I introduced myself and politely inquired if I was at the right house. "Does Lekiam live here?" I asked. Just then he appeared from a room in the back. He put his arm around his mother's shoulders and invited me inside. "So, you found it okay?" Given his mother's expression, I couldn't help but wonder if something awful had occurred right before my arrival. Seeing my concern he explained, "She always gets like this when I travel." He was packing for a trip to Mexico to teach a series of percussion master classes. He and his brother, an akpwón, both earned money for the family performing for religious ceremonies throughout the city. Their connections to ritual family around the world led to trips abroad, where they earned money playing at ceremonies and teaching their craft to others. That money would go toward the care of his two children, Arkeli and Aliya, named after his favorite R&B singers. As sure as his mother was that our

ancestors were responsible for guiding my cousin and me, although under different pretexts, to their door, she knew that ancestral forces were guiding her son abroad. What she couldn't be sure of was if the spirit guides who had made her son's trip possible had put him on a path that would lead him away from home permanently. She hoped that the spirits would continue to keep him planted here, with her, in Pogolotti.

Lekiam hoped to one day open a music school in his neighborhood for the local boys to formally learn percussion. "The dream for Afro-Cuban culture is that it doesn't lose vitality, and that people continue to defend it," he shared in our conversation. For Lekiam, the music had more than just an artistic value; it was an inheritance that would ensure the well-being of future generations, a benefaction that only they could give to themselves, and that they must protect. In contrast to the Spanish Law of Historical Memory, this inheritance was not written into international law nor linked to nation-state membership. Nonetheless, Lekiam asserted that Black Cubans should value their exclusive claim to the cultural legacy of the cabildos as descendants of the enslaved. It would help them to, like Lekiam, care for their families.

Lekiam stated that this was not the first time that Black Cubans disproportionately bore the brunt of large-scale pivots to strengthen the Cuban economy. As people of African descent, Lekiam asserted, they had a birthright and a timely need to continue to do the same. "In this moment in the world, we are in a situation where the economy is very imbalanced. . . . Our society is losing a lot of our human values. People of color [of African descent] have suffered a lot to achieve what we have, and we have to take care of what we have achieved up until now," he urged. Especially now, with so much else out of reach in society, Black people couldn't afford to take what they had for granted. The embodied wisdom of their enslaved ancestors was an inheritance worth defending. His active relationship with copresences equipped him with a racial consciousness that he used to analyze the current economic inequities. Like Yerilú, Lekiam's faith ultimately provided the analytical framework, networks, and resources for navigating, and even mitigating, the update's pernicious trappings. Perhaps this ancestral vocation was the business signaled in the lyrics that Yoruba Andabo's followers were inspired to mind.

Yet, this refuge should not be construed as an egalitarian utopia of another kind. As much as the sacred is central to assertions of dignity, more often compensation for labor, not equality, is the goal. Along the way, it also reproduces power imbalances, exclusions, and tensions across difference that I try to lay bare and grapple with. For instance, in chapter two, we

see how the sacred empowers working-class Black women to unlock creative potential and develop a Black feminist discourse. But it does not give them the means to transform their subjugated race, gender, or class status, nor does it lead Jenny to fully reject the very essentialized notions of Black womanhood that she rebukes. In chapter 3, the sacred forms the basis for Black collectivity but is not without distinction; instead, gender and initiatory status buttress the borders of belonging and hierarchy within sacred territory Yoruba Andabo's founders dutifully defend. In chapter 4, we see how an ethic of interdependence does not foreclose the naturalization of social asymmetry. The opportunities that Lekiam is afforded are enabled by the differential meanings ascribed to sex, which organize how labor is distributed and compensated, and thus directly impact one's decision-making power and earning potential. Then in chapter 5, sacred feminine presence becomes a call to collective action that is then held back and disavowed when weighed against other institutional attachments that Yoruba Andabo members do not easily relinquish. In short, rumberas and rumberos navigate the Black corporeal undercommons on unequal footing. They are moved by overlapping but distinct risks and unmet yearnings. And still, rumba formed a space they insisted on calling their own during economic change, and with that, a kind of possibility worth defending.

I mean to suggest that Black youth flocked to Yoruba Andabo because they were moved by the potential of minding their business; that is, to defend a Black standpoint from which to critically engage a changing economic landscape and an ancestral inheritance to address its shortcomings. Yoruba Andabo's performances represented a bottom-up, spirit-based response to the state's narrow social definition of blackness as folklore, for which they received little compensation, as well as the narrow opportunities for Black people in the expanding private market (Berry 2016). Attuned to its sacred choreo/geography, rumba positions us to recognize how everyday Black people contend with the weight of limiting projections on their bodies, fashion dignified selves, and rehearse more affirming possibilities.

Defending Rumba in Havana

Taking Jenny's chastisement on that hot summer day as a point of departure—that this was not dancing for dancing's sake—each chapter in the book fleshes out unique yet interrelated possibilities sought and actions justified through rumba. *Defending Rumba in Havana* shows how race, class,

gender, and the sacred intersect to shape the ways this community of practice assess and address the challenges they face in the thick of economic change. As an analytical undercurrent flowing through the chapters, I convey the moves that have led me to elaborate the concept of a Black corporeal undercommons, a sacred choreo/geography, within which those who form and are formed by rumba endeavor to find greater purpose and possibility than the nation-state project has allowed. Rather than making appeals to the state, rumberas and rumberos danced around its gaze to defend a space of social relation with the more-than-human that they called their own. The labor of sustaining this space across generational and gender difference, and physical dislocation, brings up questions around the politics of transmission, pedagogy, rehearsal, and performativity. There is surely, and will always be, more to what rumba forms than I can glean. Although this book covers new ground, it is not meant to be a comprehensive account. Rather than being a book *about* rumba, it demonstrates that there is still more to be known *through* rumba, that rumba can be a way of knowing the afterlife of slavery in a "perfecting" revolution. And it takes putting one's body in motion to get there.

The study begins by attending to the conditions of possibility that have made rumba and rumberos knowable as secular objects of study fixed within the concept of "(Afro-)Cuban culture" in the popular imaginary. The subsequent chapters analyze how this community of practice negotiates those dominant frameworks in their everyday maneuvers to navigate the latest period of economic change in Havana. Chapters 2 and 3 consider both individual and collective choreographies of rumba as Black women and men differentially contend with the emerging market's demand for specific performances of racialized gender. The analytical focus widens in chapters 4 and 5 to show how sacred subjectivity and kinship networks are mobilized and inhabit larger relations of economic exchange and the changing urban landscape of the city.

Chapter 1, "Black Inclusion, Black Enclosure," traces how elite and state interests choreographed rumba historically for nation-building. Beginning in the nineteenth century and through the 1959 Revolution, representations of Black people dancing have tended to delink the embodied practice from Black consciousness and its spiritual copresences. This process of inclusion within Cuban ethno-nationalism has relied on heteropatriarchal ideologies, reifying limiting figurations of Black femininity and Black masculinity that have also co-constructed its practice. How practitioners have strategically participated in these folkloric enclosures, and their discontents, are also explored.

The second chapter, "Black Feminist Aptitudes," takes dance pedagogy as a point of entry into how Black women theorize their movements and the relationship of those improvisations to broader structural constraints. Although I was a paying foreign student, my own body was often appraised by the same colonial heterosexist logics as those of my teachers. I think with the constrained improvisational techniques I was coached to master, to flesh out how rumberas experience and understand their uniquely raced and gendered position in the market vis-à-vis fellow rumberos, state administrators, private-business owners, and tourists. The conscious rehearsal of essentialized tropes of Black womanhood sedimented in slavery inspired me to consider rumba as a technique of dissemblance, situating its choreographies of seduction and refusal within a Black feminist tradition. Sacred epistemological and choreographic repertoires become critical tools for negotiating power, mitigating risk, asserting self-worth, and demanding compensation.

Chapter 3, "Sacred Swagger and Its Social Order," explores how sacred choreographies of Black masculinity and conceptualizations of sovereign territory coded during slavery are conjured and linked in rumba. The way rumba groups showcase the genre's Abakuá heritage, and the controversary of its simultaneous popular appeal for Black male youth and rejection by dominant white society, highlights the politics of virtuous manhood and social order in Cuba. These old contentions were heightened as New Man 2.0 discourses normalized claims to private property that protect forms of racialized economic exclusion. The swagger of Abakuá sacred fraternities is theorized as repositioning Black male youth vis-à-vis structural economic barriers and their essentialized association with social danger.

While market-oriented reforms put Black peso-poor households at a systemic disadvantage, religious duties and networks afford rumberos resources to "save their families." In chapter 4, "Moving Labor across Markets," I analyze how rumberas and rumberos maximize their economic agency by moving between folkloric display and ritual duty. This close analysis of how rumberas and rumberos labor across normative conceptions of sacred and the profane, public and private, also reveals how gendered norms of embodied devotion and divine reciprocity shape the different capacities poor Black people leverage to navigate shifting market logics. Desenvolvimiento, I argue, provides a bottom-up counterpoint to the national development plan (*plan de desarrollo*), rather than arguing for more inclusion within it.

Chapter 5 is a meditation on the choreographies of fugitive assembly that rumba inspires in public. "Underworld Assembly" situates an atypical

(though far from singular) night at a public theater within the changing social landscape of "updating" Havana. Wherein middle-class whites increasingly flee to burgeoning private-business establishments, the possibility of spiritual immanence in the state-owned venues accessible to peso-poor Blacks beckons deeper consideration of a Black radical imaginary and praxis beyond "resistance." A dance analytics allows for consideration of these constrained improvisations in broader hemispheric relation and their Black feminist potentialities.

The concluding chapter looks to the process behind the nomination of rumba to the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity as a way to return to some of the main contributions and commitments of the Black corporeal undercommons. It also draws out the necessary attunements a Black feminist posture is poised to practice in Cuba and beyond.

The epilogue, a narrative of my reunion with Jenny in 2022, presents recent developments since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and connects them to people introduced and themes raised in the ethnography.

NOTES

Preface

1 This is a basketball analogy that Daniel draws from Sally Ness's (1992) use of the image to describe the possessive relationship between Filipino society and *sinulog* dance.

2 An important exception to this has been the work of Faye Harrison, exemplified in her essay "'Three Women, One Struggle': Anthropology, Performance, and Pedagogy" (1990) which was published in the inaugural issue of *Transforming Anthropology*, the journal of the Association of Black Anthropologists. However, she is arguably least known for this arts-based work, and her background in performance is often ignored for how it informed her praxis of decolonizing anthropology.

Introduction

1 Rumba's Blackness does not preclude the participation of people who may be categorized as non-Black (within Cuba's spectrum of racial classification). The performativity and social construction of Blackness in relation to rumba, space, and spiritual belonging is elaborated in the following section and resurfaces throughout the ethnography.

2 I thank Julie Skurski for highlighting the significance of this scholarly focus within the rumba literature.

3 The currency was later unified in 2021. That pandemic context is addressed in the epilogue. However, during the period of research for this book, the dual currency system still applied.

4 Other scholars of the Caribbean have similarly analyzed popular visions of belonging among the poor as they negotiate the effects of neoliberal capitalist globalization in the context of "post-colonial" nation-building. A prime and useful example is Deborah Thomas's (2004) analysis of the changing relationship between national and popular culture and the political economy of development in Jamaica as a result of intensified globalization (3). She puts forth "modern blackness" as the emergent

framework used by working-class Jamaicans to assess present and future possibilities, which is distinct from the "folk" or "revolutionary" blackness promoted by the institutionalized middle-class models of progress (231). Within that, she identifies artistic representation and the performing arts—namely, popular music, theater, and dance—as key realms through which people experience and mediate their relationships to global processes that constitute particular subjectivities. She posits, and my ethnography emphatically affirms, that this eschewal of prior visions of territorially bound belonging and creole multiracial subjectivity should constitute something other than crisis.

5 See Devyn Spence Benson (2016) for a history of anti-racist activism in the 1960s. A special issue of *Cuban Studies* 48 (2019) compiles the positions and demands of the most prominent members of the contemporary "Afro-Cuban Movement."

6 Excellent studies of the re-stratification of Cuban society under Raúl Castro in "New Cuba," with specific attention to lines of race and class, include Hansing (2017) and Hansing and Hoffmann (2019). See Anasa Hicks (2019) for a gendered labor study of domestic service in "new Cuba."

7 "Stone" here references the stones that are imbued with sacred powers when an orisha is "born."

8 It warrants mention that none of the rumba ensembles in their networks had white women as members. See chapter 2 for a discussion of the politics of race and gender for women dancers.

9 The way I arrived at this nomination performs what it describes, in that agency is not individually conceived; I got there through a push from Thomas F. DeFrantz. Perhaps it was more of a nudge in the direction of Moten and Harney's *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (2013), based on a cursory description of a feeling that in it was language for what I was only just beginning to put into words. This book has, in a way, become a response to that call, from that nudge, for that feeling. No doubt, DeFrantz's scholarship and community-building praxis within the study of African diasporic dance has created a generative commons to think seriously through "orisha dancing *and* the sacred praise dance after the night at the club" (DeFrantz 2020).

10 See Deschamps Chapeaux's (1983) study of fugitivity in the city of Havana. Chapter 1 describes how the cabildos de nación figured into the city's sociopolitical and sonic landscape during and after slavery.

11 The jailing of Black historian and Communist Party member Walterio Carbonell and the suppression of his book *Critique: On the Emergence of National Culture* (1961), an inspiration for later generations of Black intellectuals, is an important example (Benson 2016; Fernández Robaina 2022).

12 Given the context, another viable translation could be, "One's own business, not someone else's!" The English-language version of the newspaper, which would have the official translation provided by the PCC, was

not accessible via the *Granma* internet archive at the time of publication. Either way, the exaltation of self-employment over state employment is unmistakable.

1. Black Inclusion, Black Enclosure

1 "The Cuban Five" refers to five Cuban men who were arrested in 1998 in the United States and sentenced for espionage for their involvement in an undercover mission to infiltrate Cuban-American organizations in Miami that have historically targeted the Cuban government since Fidel Castro's legendary 26th of July Movement overthrew the US-backed Cuban president, Fulgencio Batista, in 1959. After the Cuban Revolution, a sector of the Cuban population (primarily the white and upper-/middle classes) fled to the United States as political exiles, the bulk of whom settled in South Florida. They have been the most vocal proponents of anti-Castro and anti-Communist mobilization in that area, becoming an important voting block that has continued to influence the United States' harsh foreign policy toward the island. In Cuba, the Five are revered as martyrs and model patriots who defended the Cuban Revolution from the so-called Cuban-American terrorists. The Cuban campaign for the release of all five prisoners has gained international attention and support from Cuba's allies around the world, and during my fieldwork was a mainstay on Cuban TV. In school, Cuban children learned to list the names of the "Five Heroes" from rote memory: Gerardo, Ramón, Antonio, Fernando, y René. After fourteen years of imprisonment in the United States, Fernando González Llort was the second of the famous Cuban Five to return home, thanks to negotiations that took place after the brief normalization of diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba under the Obama administration. The concert took place a mere two days after his release and repatriation.

2 I thank Reviewer 1 for helping me to articulate and refine the focus of this chapter accordingly.

3 Here I am drawing on the concept of racial states by David Theo Goldberg (2001).

4 To endeavor to critically examine seminal ethnographic writings about the Spanish-speaking Caribbean within their historical moment of production is not altogether new but rather aligns with critical assessments of the relationship between epistemology and power in anthropology, ethnomusicology, and art history of the African diaspora (Thornton and Ubiera 2019; Garcia 2017; Fabian 1983; Palmié 2013; K. Thompson 2011; Garcia 2013).

5 The performance of secrecy in the construction of group identity is prevalent across the African diaspora. In chapter 3, I delve into the gendered