

Excited Delirium

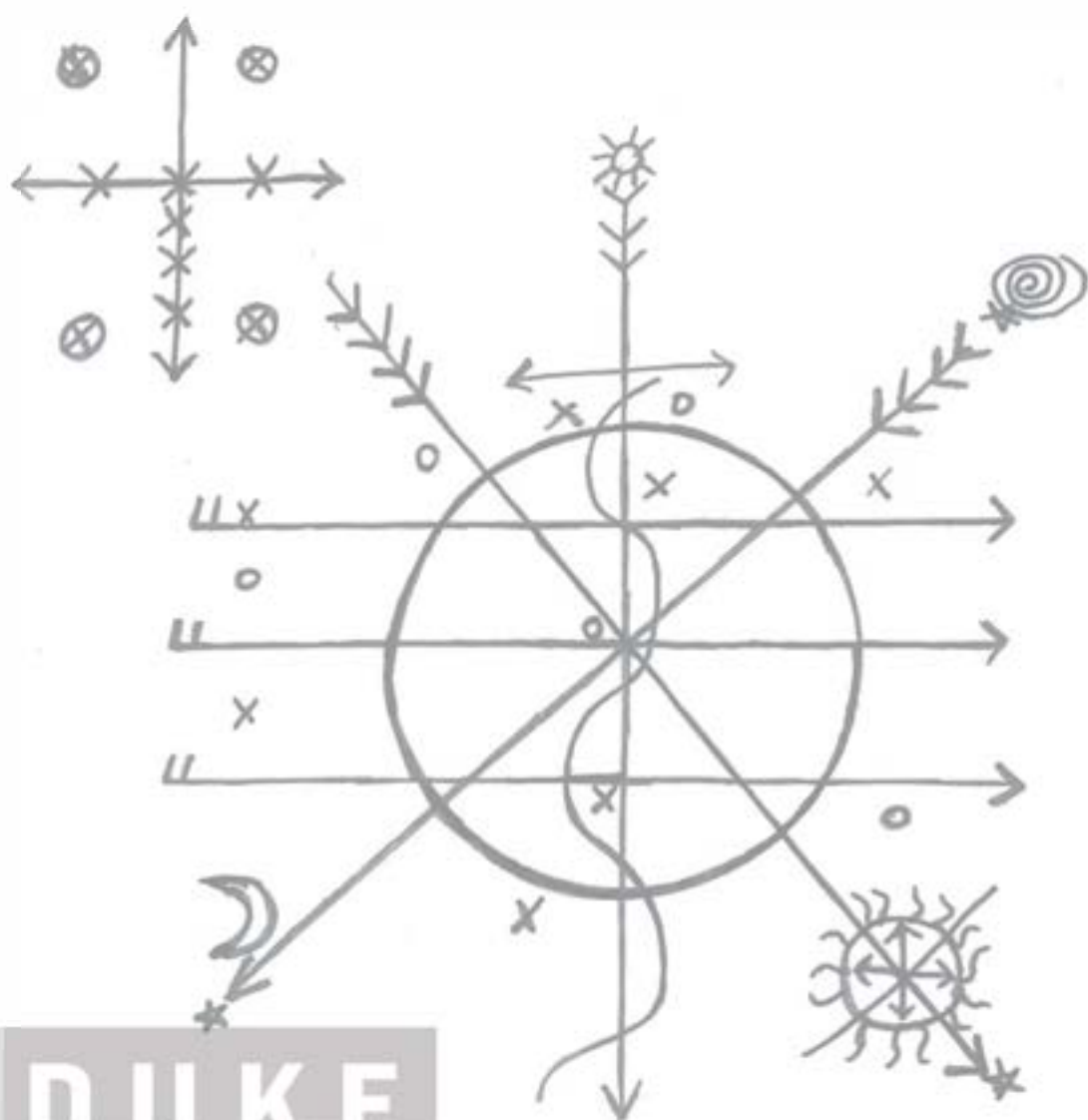
Race, Police Violence,
and the Invention
of a Disease



Aisha M. Beliso-De Jesús

Excited Delirium

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RACE, POLICE VIOLENCE, AND
THE INVENTION OF A DISEASE

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For Sito and Jeremy Ellis,
*and for all those inaccurately labeled
as excited delirium*

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Author's Note

In Warning . . .

This book tells troubling stories of death, rape, murder, and racial violence. I am aware that the constant circulation of Black people's deaths tends to desensitize some and tantalize others. Although as scholars it is somewhat impossible to completely avoid complicity in racialized suffering, I deliberately try not to sensationalize these accounts. Yet, to examine the full scope of this problem in our society, I cannot ignore the pertinent details that have led to the emergence of the death classification I discuss in these pages. I warn you to never lose sight of the goal, which is always a collective undoing. In telling these difficult stories, I have chosen not to reproduce photographs of people's dead bodies. Afro-Latiné teachings tell us that photographs conjure their own energies. I take up the call of social justice historians who, while acknowledging that most criminal narratives are written from law enforcement perspectives, utilize their work to uncover hidden injustices. I offer this book as a prayer to undo the pandemic of police violence and death that impacts us all.

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Introduction: Haunted

Our nation—on the cusp of becoming a collection of all the words we fear; all the little truths we white-washed and blacked out are coming back to haunt us.

—Khalisa Rae, “Epilogue for Banned Books”

(excerpt from *Ghost in a Black Girl's Throat*, 2021)

EVERYONE HAD WRITTEN JEREMY ELLIS OFF. Maybe that is why he began to haunt me.

It started about two weeks before I was scheduled to interview Jeremy's daughter, Jade Ellis. I could not sleep at night.¹ Intrusive thoughts seemed to take over my research and writing. I had strange dreams of people dying; the police were involved. I wondered if I was being triggered by studying police violence. I grew up in the 1980s and 1990s in San Francisco's Mission District. At that time, the Latiné community I came from in “the Mission” lived in fear, stemming both from street gang beefs that made it difficult to walk from one block to the next and from the police, who were known for their abuse and violence. Coming from a family of Puerto Ricans who practiced Afro-Caribbean religions made my childhood especially anxious: I had the additional concern that we would be seen as an evil “cult.” I learned the hard way that the police were also a real danger.

One summer evening in 1994, I walked out of my apartment on Twenty-Fourth Street to see that René, my partner at the time, was being arrested. The

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cops had hopped out of their car to harass him and his friends for being young Brown men, as they regularly did. I was a teenager, nine months pregnant with my first child, and I made the mistake of asking the officer why he was arresting my partner. The officer came around the car, told me to “shut up,” and with no concern for my swollen belly, roughly put my hands behind my back and handcuffed me. He then shoved my shoulders down painfully and forced me to sit on the sidewalk. I was humiliated and scared. *What would happen to our unborn child if René and I were both arrested?*

A few weeks later, I would give birth to a beautiful, brown-skinned boy, Neto. Like most mothers of Black and Brown children, and especially of Black and Brown boys, I have worried about him every day since.

That feeling of powerlessness never leaves you. It does not matter that I was not arrested and that I went on to complete a doctorate in anthropology and to become a tenured professor at two Ivy League schools. The force of racialized state power lingers.² It creates a nervous tension that builds up in Black and Brown people’s guts when we encounter police, who are always able to wield violence with impunity.

Twenty years later, when I began to conduct research on the policing and criminalization of Afro-Caribbean religions in the United States, I was aware that research can impact the scholar. People do not usually speak much about the toll that the research of traumatic phenomena can take on the mental health of researchers themselves. I chalked up the difficulty I was having in writing this book to the subject itself—it certainly evoked strong emotions in me. Still, I could not shake the feeling that there was more to this research that was haunting me.³

The haunting started when I was researching the policing of Afro-Latiné religions and came across a little-known cause-of-death classification called *excited delirium syndrome*. Medical examiners have used the syndrome when assigning cause to the unexplained deaths of mostly Black and Latiné men killed during police interactions. To me, it sounded made-up. The term itself was troubling, but as I looked into the scientific explanations of the syndrome, it seemed even more problematic. I found that excited delirium syndrome was a controversial diagnosis for people who are said to have exhibited “superhuman strength”; are considered impervious to pain; are said to have become aggressive, excited, sweaty, and agitated; and who then suddenly “up and died,” as police officers have been known to say. In this context, police officers are seen as innocent bystanders who just happen to witness the unexplainable deaths of so-called criminals, who are subsequently written off

as having caused their own deaths. However, almost all these deaths occur during police interactions, and they almost always involve police use of force, such as hog-tying people, applying carotid choke holds, kneeling on people's bodies, stunning them with Tasers, injecting them with sedatives, or imposing other forms of forceful restraint.

After my discovery of excited delirium syndrome, I could not get it out of my head. It was as if I saw excited delirium syndrome everywhere. For example, in 2020, my eldest son, Neto, now a grown man with a family of his own, had purchased his first home. His family chose Antioch, California, whose rolling hills, warmer climate, and suburban houses promised relief from the everyday violence of city living. And he was not alone. Thousands of Black and Brown families were relocating to Antioch from San Francisco and Oakland. That same year in Antioch, on December 23, just two days before Christmas, a brown-skinned, thirty-year old Filipino man named Angelo Quinto was killed during a police interaction.

I found Quinto's story—one of the many stories of excited delirium that kept appearing to me as if by coincidence—through a newspaper archive I had accessed for my research. Medical examiners claimed Quinto's death was caused by "excited delirium syndrome." Multiple officers at the scene had knelt on Quinto's body until he ceased to struggle. When paramedics arrived, Quinto was purple and unresponsive, and he had blood coming out of his nose and mouth.⁴ Just seven months earlier, the world was rocked by videos of the death of George Perry Floyd, who, like Quinto, had also been knelt on by multiple officers before dying in police custody. Amid world-wide protests and demands for police accountability during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the justice system took a serious look into Floyd's death, leading to the officers' being charged. A little-known fact is that police and attorneys described both Quinto and Floyd as having allegedly exhibited excited delirium syndrome.

Although in many other cases, attributing the deaths of people in police custody to excited delirium syndrome has worked to exonerate police from culpability, the video of police treatment of George Floyd would not allow his death to be so easily dismissed. The world saw Officer Derek Chauvin kneeling on Floyd's neck for more than nine minutes. Even though Chauvin's defense team relied on excited delirium syndrome at the trial, the diagnosis seemed to evaporate from the narrative of Floyd's death. A year later, on April 20, 2021, Chauvin was found guilty on all three counts: unintentional second-degree murder, third-degree murder, and second-degree manslaughter.

I became obsessed with excited delirium syndrome. As I looked into death after death, the syndrome took over the early months of my fellowship at Stanford University, where I was on leave from teaching while writing this book. I did not realize then that it was possible I was being haunted.⁵ What felt like an unexpected rabbit hole in my research had become so much more.

* * *

With excited delirium syndrome in my head, I made my way from Stanford University to the East Bay on September 17, 2021, to my son Neto's house in Antioch, where I planned to interview, at his suggestion, Jade Ellis. Neto told me that Jade had an important story.

In my research for this book, I was exploring how practitioners in the United States have been drawing on the ancestral tools of Afro-Latiné religions such as Santería and Palo Monte to combat police violence. I wanted to see how they used *spiritual activism* to heal generational trauma and transform the world.⁶ My son Neto and his partner, Naomi, are at the forefront of this work. They have created an *ile* (house-temple) in the Bay Area made up of a collective of Black and Brown queer, trans, undocumented, and formerly incarcerated young people, educators, and artists who are actively changing their world through Afro-Latiné ritual teachings. Jade, an Afro-Latiné trans woman from Los Angeles, practices spirituality as a form of activism against police violence.

A poet, liberation artist, and advocate, Jade was about to undergo initiation to become a priestess of Afro-Cuban Santería. This religious practice, passed down from enslaved African peoples in Cuba, has continued to serve as a healing strategy for generations of Black Latiné people in the Americas.⁷ My family are longtime practitioners of Santería.

Once I arrived at my son's house, Jade's soft six-foot-tall presence hovered over my own loud five-foot-one body. Jade was dressed all in white and wore a head wrap; her sparkling eyes, caramel-colored skin, and luxurious eyelashes outlined a deep knowing. Jade's gaze revealed a person who has lived through too much pain, too much trauma, but who refuses to succumb. Her quiet assuredness made her seem fearless. I immediately admired her.

Our first interview was in my granddaughter Nayari's nursery. White-and-blue polka-dot wallpaper framed a window that looked out on the cul-de-sac of the suburban neighborhood. A wicker giraffe bookshelf with children's books accompanied a world map featuring cartoon animals. The zebra-striped blanket in the crib rounded out the gender-neutral animal theme I had helped

create. We sat at a white desk, slightly facing each other. My laptop was open, and I recorded our conversation and took some notes. I was upbeat, happy to finally start the interview. Jade is a busy person, and she was in the Bay Area that weekend to undergo some of her ceremonies. I was so grateful that she had stayed an extra day so we could speak.

“I walk into a room, and I’ve already fucked up so many people’s perceptions of what the world is, you know,” Jade tells me of the violent reactions encountered by Black trans women. Jade’s mother, Carmen, was born in Los Angeles to Mexican and Salvadoran parents, and Jade’s father, Jeremy, was African American and raised among Mexican and Central American *cholos*. Jeremy spoke Spanish, ate spicy foods, and dated Latina women; he was what scholars might consider latinized as a result of the commingling of urban life in a place where Latiné tastes, customs, and cultures thrived.⁸

Jade, a Black American Latina who practices Afro-Cuban religions, identifies as Afro-Latiné, one of the myriad terms used to acknowledge the “crossings” of Blackness and Latinidad.⁹ Such “ethnoracial intimacies” allow for creative and expressive blends that include “children of African American and Latino mixed heritage,” like Jade, as well as Black Latiné or Afro-Latiné communities “with Afro-diasporic ancestry outside the U.S. national boundaries.”¹⁰

I knew that Jade had become an activist against police violence because of her father’s death, but I did not know much else about her when we sat down for our first interview. Within the first five minutes, Jade told me that her father, Jeremy Ellis, had been killed on June 11, 2011, during a police interaction. Jade was thirteen when she wrote her first poem, where she first put the pain of her father’s death to paper, which she described as baring “her soul” on his grave and becoming her father’s “shadow.”

Even ten years later, Jade was still upset with her father about the timing of his death. To her, it seemed so selfish of him. Jade and her sister, Eva, had not seen Jeremy for a while, and they had made plans to celebrate Father’s Day together. “Because he was either locked up or on drugs or making another family and all that shit, you know. And then literally he died the day before Father’s Day. And, after a handful of years of not seeing each other, we were going to see each other, and then he died the day before Father’s Day. So, I went craaaaazy.” She let herself smile.

Jade felt like kin to me—someone who pushes aside pain with humor to survive. She had a knack for placing her trauma into structural perspectives, and as a result, Jade has developed a profound outlook on life in her twenty-three years. Affirming my perception of her, Jade told me that she had “always

been the parent” in her household. After her father’s death, she had to mobilize; at thirteen, she became an activist against police violence.

Jade told me how her father’s spirit had attached to her after he died. She “kind of became him for a while.” Struggling with gender and people telling her how to be, she needed an out. “And then my dad died, and I was like, ‘Oh well, I know how to do that.’ So, I went through this whole spiral where I was like, I have to basically become my dad to preserve him. And so, I started dressing like him.” Laughing, she told me, “Yeah. I went crazy for years and started doing him.”

The circumstances surrounding Jeremy Ellis’s death perplexed his friends and family. With an ironic chuckle, Jade tells me, “It’s on brand for him.” Jade did not really know what actually happened to her dad. She knew that he was killed during a police car chase. She knew that police considered Jeremy to be responsible for his own death. “It was unexplainable,” she told me. “He just up and died.”

A chill ran through my body when Jade said those words. It felt as though the temperature in the room had suddenly dropped. I stopped typing on my laptop and looked up at her, stunned.

“What did you just say?” I asked, thinking I might have misheard her.

“What?” she asked me, confused at my reaction. “That he up and died?”

Hesitantly, I asked her, “Do you know if the cause of death was excited delirium syndrome?”

She slowly nodded her head up and down. “How did you know?”

I could not believe that my strange obsession with excited delirium deaths might somehow connect to Jade Ellis’s father. Nervously, I responded, “I think your dad’s spirit might be trying to contact me.”

Then Jade surprised me. She smiled, showing a slight dimple, and said, “He’s so annoying.”

I was freaked out.

* * *

When I started to write this book in September 2021, I had been researching the policing and criminalization of Afro-Latiné religions in the United States for nine years. Black Latiné people in the United States have cultivated the religious interconnections of Afro-Latinidad since at least the 1800s.¹¹ Afro-Cubans, Afro–Puerto Ricans, Afro-Dominicans, and other Black Latiné communities in the 1920s gathered in collective solidarity struggles and religious association across the country.¹² In the United States, such ethnic and

racial “crossings” are “color lines” that emerge where Blackness, Brownness, dark-Brownness, and other racial formations are brought in relation to one another through various forms of White supremacy.¹³ Afro-Latiné religions historically arose from survival mobilizations of enslaved Africans; today, these religions are treasured tools that continue to be wielded in the liberatory strategies of differently racialized peoples.

Practices such as Afro-Cuban Santería and Palo Monte, Haitian Vodou, Espiritismo Africano, and other Afro-Latiné inspirations have a history of being repressed, from the island countries from which they emerged to the transnational locations where they now live. In New York, Florida, California, and across the United States, a diverse group of people from different countries come together—an array of color lines, shades of Brown and Black Latiné people forming new communities. Still, we Black, Brown, dark Brown, and light Brown peoples find ourselves under siege, our religions depicted as “un-American,” “evil,” “dangerous,” and “criminal.”¹⁴ We encounter the *layering* of White hegemonies, forcing us to contend with both the Anglo White supremacy in the United States and also the Latino White supremacy that attempts to conflate Latinidad with Whiteness.¹⁵ Because Afro-Latiné religions challenge the Whiteness of Latinidad, they are met with anti-Blackness and anti-Africanness in addition to anti-immigrant xenophobia.

I began conducting ethnographic research with practitioners of Afro-Latiné religions and police officers across the country on the policing and criminalizing of Afro-Latiné religions in 2013. Now I had a fellowship at Stanford’s Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences (CASBS) to be able to write a book on this topic. I was thankful to be getting started. But then Jeremy Ellis found me, and excited delirium syndrome haunted me.

I picked up my laptop and waved it in front of Jade, telling her, “You’re not going to believe this, but I have been researching excited delirium syndrome for the past few weeks!”—as if shaking my laptop in the air would somehow demonstrate to her that this could not be a simple coincidence. But I did not need to convince Jade that her dad was haunting me. With the assuredness of her spiritual understanding, Jade accepted Jeremy’s presence as truth. She explained to me that she had come to Santería to heal her family’s generational traumas.

I knew from my own understanding, gleaned from growing up within and studying Afro-Cuban religions that spirits communicate in a number of ways. Practitioners elevate and uplift deceased family members’ spirits and transform the power and potentiality of what I have previously termed their *copresences*.¹⁶

These copresences account for the embodied ways that Afro-Latiné religious practitioners navigate the world, interacting with a range of spiritual presences that include deceased family members as well as the Yorùbá orisha or Congo spirits, among other entities. I thought out loud, suggesting to Jade that she had probably activated Jeremy's spirit. She agreed. Jade told me that her poetry was a form of spiritual recitation—that she had started creating poetry because of her dad's death. It was her form of spiritual activism.

"I started organizing, and I started getting politically educated, and I needed something that I [could] reference . . . , kind of like sort out all my shit," she told me. "That's how I started writing poetry. My first poem was about my dad dying when I was super young."

Jade's poetic spiritual activism to uplift and heal generational trauma echoes my own path from Latina teen mom to full professor. Something in my story, in my background, also has to do with this journey. Jade related to me how she used spiritual activism to relieve the pain and anger of the trauma she had experienced.

"I also knew that I needed something constructive," she told me. "So that was most of my fight. Because I also think when you first get politically educated, you're so angry about so much shit—you know what I mean—because it's like, you're being dropped from the matrix for the first time. So, it's like grief from dad and grieving. Like, everything shattering."

For me, the interview with Jade shattered everything. Two fundamental aspects of my self—the academic and the spiritual—suddenly collided. The experience opened something up in me. Jade made me realize that I had been in a struggle with myself. I had not allowed myself to see the larger impact of my work and who I was as someone born and raised in Afro-Latiné religions. Although I had dedicated my life to trying to heal generational trauma and combat structural oppression, I had tried to keep my spiritual life separate from my academic life.

While writing this book, I started keeping a journal. I hoped it would help me work through my struggle to maintain a separation between the academic and spiritual parts of myself. Instead, the journal helped me grapple with the troubling reality that medical examiners had produced an industry that effectively whitewashed police violence. This research led me to discover that the criminalization of Afro-Latiné religions and the policing of Black Americans are central to the emergence of excited delirium syndrome. These stories coincided with that of a medical examiner from Miami, Charles Victor

Wetli, the man who coined the term *excited delirium syndrome* and who also, strangely, was a so-called expert on Afro-Caribbean “cults.”

Excited delirium syndrome was created to cover up the role of police violence in deaths from Tasers, choke holds, beatings, shootings, and other abuse. This fake syndrome produced a circular industry of expertise—a lucrative arrangement wherein police officers, paramedics, medical examiners, lawyers, and researchers not only hide the deaths of Black and Brown people at the hands of police but also become “experts” who are paid to medicalize this violence. Companies such as Taser International contract with this industry of experts to hide the lethality of the Taser electroshock weapon with stories of excited delirium syndrome.

I decided to share my journal entries as ethnographic data to reveal my process of discovering excited delirium syndrome. The journals also illustrate how my Afro-Latiné cultural traditions are part of my own healing process—of being a scholar traumatized by what my research uncovered, of needing to find a way through this material. All scholars are rooted in their cultural practices and social structures, and yet we are trained not to disclose the ways we can be deeply impacted by our work. As I found my way through these troubling accounts, the spirits made themselves available. This could have been because I am a social scientist also accompanied by spirits, orisha, and other copresences who have provided me with a unique attunement to the world, one that allows me to perceive the guidance of these energies. However, Afro-Latiné traditions teach me that these copresences are persistently there, engaging with people, even when individuals are unwilling to recognize their existence. The copresences have worked to make this book happen. It was Jeremy Ellis’s spirit who first showed me that there was more to the story of excited delirium.

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Notes

Introduction

Epigraph: Selection from Khalisa Rae's poem "Epilogue for Banned Books," dedicated to Alice Walker in *Ghost in a Black Girl's Throat*, 81.

1. In keeping with anthropological norms, I employ pseudonyms for research interlocutors. The names of colleagues, family members, and friends remain unchanged, except when requested.

2. See the important work of Christen A. Smith, "Facing the Dragon," in which she talks about the lingering effects of police violence on families and communities through her term "sequelae."

3. Ghosts, specters, and haunting have long been deployed as metaphors in academic scholarship. Even as this work departs from using spirits as analogies, I am still shaped by and indebted to the work of sociologist Avery Gordon, whose important book *Ghostly Matters* showed haunting as a paradigm from which to theorize the complications of life and the sociological enterprise. In addition, the work of Jacques Derrida's "hauntology" launched a whole "spectral turn" in the 1990s, drawing on ghosts and haunting as metaphors for capitalism. See Derrida, *Specters of Marx*. Subsequently, an interest emerged in haunting as an analogy in poststructuralism. Haunting was ripe in literary studies, cultural studies, and social theory, which even produced a literary subfield called "spectral studies." See Blanco and Peeren, *Spectralities Reader*.

In this book, however, I do not talk about my haunting as a useful theoretical model. Indeed, some would say that this metaphor has already worn thin. Instead, this work is more in line with the memoir of Black feminist law professor and critical race theorist Patricia Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*. Williams honestly divulges her rage, paranoia, and depression that results from being an academic living with racism, which she sees as a lively phantom; this phantom of racism comes after Williams with its powerful presence. Williams also describes the power of her late godmother's bedroom. Williams tried to empty its contents, only to find that the room would

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assault her: “The room asserted itself, came rushing and raging at me. . . . The force of its spirit still drifts like an odor throughout the house” (49). This work contributes to how Black and Brown experience with spirits demands a different attunement to time, space, place, and presence.

4. “State AG to Investigate Angelo Quinto’s Death in Antioch Police Custody,” *Bay City News*, September 7, 2022, <https://www.nbcbayarea.com/news/local/east-bay/angelo-quinto-antioch-death-investigation/2997166/>.

5. For example, even though Avery Gordon speaks of ghosts as a useful language with which to ground the way the past haunts the present, she aptly captures how spirits are a “seething presence” that meddle with “taken-for-granted realities.” Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 8. Gordon talks about how apparitions reveal something lost. In her case, she also found herself compelled to conduct certain research because of the “persistent and troubling ghosts in the house” (8).

6. See the important work of Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, in which she writes about her poetry and scholarship as “spiritual activism.” Her poetic scholarship has been described as “a weapon in the fight against colonization” (Hartley, “Curandera of Conquest,” 155–56). Hartley calls her a “Curandera of Conquest” because of her ability to both “challenge and problematize Western epistemology, but also to heal it and us from its violent processes and colonial legacies” (135). Anzaldúa’s poetry and scholarship are a form of spiritual activism, revealing how we have “inherited and embodied” colonial legacies, especially in our reproduction of “dominant forms of inquiry” (155–56).

7. My interlocutors in this book would switch between the terms *Latiné*, *Latinx*, *Latina*, and *Latino*. Some advocate for *Latinx* as a new form born of millennial social media activism concerning gender fluidity, while others have argued that this term is another English-centric product of US imperialism that is difficult for Spanish-speaking peoples and does not reflect Indigenous people from the Americas. I decided to use *Latiné* because it seems to flow a bit more easily off the tongue and also bridges across other transnational solidarity movements in Latin America, Mexico, the Caribbean, and the United States. When quoting other scholarship or when people self-identify as *Latina/o/x*, I use those terms. Ultimately, language is fluid, and our terms are imperfect. *Latiné* itself continues to privilege the coloniality of Spanish and Portuguese relations and ignores other racial formations such as Blackness, Indigeneity, and Asian influences. See also “Latine vs. Latinx: What They Mean, Why They Matter,” LATV Media, August 10, 2021, <https://latv.com/latine-vs-latinx>.

8. Sandín and Perez, *Contemporary U.S. Latino/a Literary Criticism*, 2.

9. Milian, *Latining America*. See also the important works of Jorge Duany (“Nation on the Move”) on how *Latiné* nationalisms travel between colonial relations, and Lorgia García Peña’s *Translating Blackness*, which shows how diaspora has been used to destabilize national borders.

10. Queer of color scholars E. Patrick Johnson and Ramón Rivera Servera call these blends “Blacktino.” Johnson and Rivera-Servera, *Blacktino*, 3. I use *Afro-Latiné* here to also refer to the intimate and creative blends of Blackness and Latinidad in religious

practices that emerged through specific histories of chattel slavery, colonialism, and Indigenous genocide in the Americas, and that have traveled and transformed with practitioners who remake these inspirations in and through diaspora. *Afro-Latiné* allows for the gender fluidity, radical consciousness, and racial and ethnic play that animate my interlocutors' social spaces with the living and the dead.

11. Racialized state violence in Brazil is also very important for Afro-Latiné formations. Brazil is home to 70 percent of the world's Afro-Latiné people. Practitioners of Candomblé in the United States tend to return to Brazil for their ceremonies, and so experience a different kind of visibility and policing in the United States. See Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*. See also Colin M. MacLachlan, review of *Afro-Latin America 1800–2000*, by George Reid Andrews.

12. López, *Unbecoming Blackness*. See also Román and Flore, *The Afro-Latin@ Reader*, 4–5.

13. People in the United States are made into “colors” (Black, Brown, Red, Yellow) because of their relation to Whiteness and White supremacy. They also then interact and “cross” with one another through this racialized power structure. See Milian, *Latining America*, 12.

14. I use the terms *Brown*, *dark Brown*, and *light Brown* to reference the complexity of race, emphasizing their relevance both in the context of Black identities as well as in relation to distinct forms of White supremacy. The varying shades of Brown highlight the nuance and ambiguity of racial distinctions and how racial color lines shift across the United States, the Caribbean, and Latin America.

15. As Antonio López shows, Latiné people who are racialized as Black must navigate the violences of “an Anglo white supremacy” that determines our life chances in the United States, while also contending with “a Latino white supremacy” that “reproduces the colonial and postcolonial Latin American privileging of *Blanco* over *Negro* and *Mulato* (mixed-race) identities. López, *Unbecoming Blackness*, 5.

16. I first coined the term *copresence* in my article “Santería Copresence.” Then I developed the term further in my book *Electric Santería*.

Chapter One. Nightmares

1. The energy of the Great Mother (*Èyè Òrò*) in orisha philosophies is one such frame with which we can harness justice. Orisha craftings use an enclosed calabash, or clay pot, as the protective covering to channel this power, mirroring the roundness of the mother's belly and the embrace of the earth. T. Washington, *The Architects of Existence*, 8, 85.

2. Lexie Verdon, “Thousands in Cuba Ask Peruvian Refuge,” *Washington Post*, April 7, 1980, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1980/04/07/thousands-in-cuba-ask-peruvian-refuge/987ab70f-3cbe-4ad3-afcd-a6fcb9152d93/>.

3. Karen Juanita Carrillo, “The Mariel Boatlift: How Cold War Politics Drove Thousands of Cubans to Florida in 1980,” *History.com*, September 28, 2020, <https://www.history.com/news/mariel-boatlift-castro-carter-cold-war>.