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The Whole World is a Rumba Nueva:

The Creation of Transnational Communities through Performance and Social Media in New York City and Havana

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The Whole World is a Rumba Nueva:

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by

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The Whole World is a Rumba Nueva:

The Creation of Transnational Communities through Performance and Social Media in New York City and Havana

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the world of the Cuban rumba – an intricate complex of music, dance, and song that encourages both individual display and communal participation. From 1991 to 2012, rumba performances came to feature a distinctive complex of styles, meanings, and politics that I dubbed the *rumba nueva* (new rumba). The *rumba nueva* distinguished itself from previous iterations of the rumba in its transnationality, its connections to the African diaspora, its use of social media, and its artistic transformations under the "Special Period" of the Cuban economy that emerged in the 1990s.

New York City, Havana, and Facebook served as the main field sites. Using participant observation, traditional ethnography, and cyber-ethnography, this study

considers how rumba enthusiasts and performers strategically negotiate gender, ethnic, and racial identities. It examines the transformative effects that live performances and representations of these performances in social media have on the politics and artistry of the rumba.

The study also traces shifts in audiences, practices, and communities over the course of the *rumba nueva*. Staged rumbas for tourists supplanted spontaneous community-oriented rumbas. Multi-ethnic alliances exploded in differing views of ownership. Discourses on a transnational African diaspora and the experience of governmental surveillance politicized the genre in unanticipated ways.

Afro-Latinidad theory provides an interpretive framework for understanding these transformations. This theoretical model yields new ways to analyze the rumba in light of transnational cultural processes, diaspora formation, and connectivity through Internet social media. The detailed ethnography presented here, along with innovative interpretive frames, provides a foundation for future research on the rumba and its multiple meanings.

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Chapter 1 Overview

INTRODUCTION: FELIX "PUPY" INSUA FAREWELL PARTY[1]

Sparkling, gold-capped teeth reflected off the camera phone flashes in the crowd. Young men with flamboyant Dolce & Gabbana sequin embroidered shirts mingled with lanky men with cream-colored cotton *guayabera* shirts.[2] Colorful wardrobe choices articulated multifaceted narratives, as did syncopated body movements that emulated the sounds of the percussionists. The drummers' hands cast shadows that darted back and forth across the pulsating, vibrating crowd. The chatter of the crowd collapsed like torrential sheets of rain every time the claves struck. The claves created the pulse that maintained the rhythm of the rumba. As the tempo accelerated, a man and a woman gyrated to the sonic vibrations of the claves, the drums, and the singers' syncopated intonations.

One of the male singers from Los Muñequitos de Matanzas[2] rhythmically gesticulated with his hands as if he were throwing droplets of sweat to the ground. The audience responded in kind, mimicking his pantomime. A female dancer joined him on the stage. Her rhythm glided both with and against his swaying hips. Their gestures and

1 This landmark event in the history of the *rumba nueva* was held at El Fogon Center of the Arts, Mott Haven neighborhood, Bronx, New York, on May 6, 2011.

2 A long-sleeve, four-pocket shirt considered distinctively Cuban in origin

movements formed a continuation of the verbal conversations that took place outside of this electrified, circular space.

The young Muñequito threw his energy to the woman's gyrating pelvis in the form of a *vacuna* (vaccination), the symbolic sexual thrust to her groin that a *rumbera* (female rumba dancer) should block with her hands or clothes. She missed his *vacuna*! The crowd's enthusiastic response communicated to the uninformed the unspoken rules of this game.

This was a bittersweet rumba that would be Felix "Pupy" Insua's last. Pupy, "the Lion" of the New York rumba scene, was sick with terminal cancer. Most people did not know how severe it was. Many had assumed that he was taking a temporary leave to recuperate in Cuba's tropical climate. The community came together to give Pupy a *despidida* (farewell) rumba in his honor.

During their North American tour in 2011, the Muñequitos made a visit to El Fogon Center of the Arts, an African diaspora themed arts venue, to pay homage to Pupy, a friend of the elder members of the group. El Fogon overflowed with bodies that humid, cloudy night. Word had spread throughout New York City that the Muñequitos would be giving an informal show at a discounted ticket price in Pupy's honor.

Pupy, usually at the epicenter of the rumba, was now a gaunt spectator. He gazed nostalgically at the crowd, absorbing the immense artistic energies that swirled around him. Only months before, his smile had flashed as his long dreadlocks glided across his

face. Now his face was dull and grayish. His smiles formed slowly, but they were still strong. A few short months later, the New York rumba community had lost one of its greatest ambassadors.

African Diaspora 2.0: The Cuban Rumba and the New Social Media

This dissertation explores the world of the rumba – an intricate complex of music, dance, and songs that encourages both individual display and group participation. Through semi-improvised dance and song, the *rumbero* exhibits artistic mastery that then provokes the audience into a collective response.

The study focuses on interconnected performances of the rumba in New York City and Havana since the early 1990s, and on recent discussions of these performances on the "Rumba in NYC" group on Facebook. These performances constitute what I term the *rumba nueva* (new rumba). I argue that the *rumba nueva* is distinct from previous iterations in its transnationality, its connectivity through social media, and its transformations under the "Special Period" of the Cuban economy that emerged in the 1990s.[3]

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3 Beginning in 1991 after the fall of the Soviet Union, Cuba lost 80 percent of its imports and exports, and the country's Gross Domestic Product dropped by 34 percent. Food, medicine, and oil imports discontinued or slowed. In *Pay Inequality in Cuba: the Special Period and After*, Gailbraith, Spagnolo, and Munevar describe the end of the Special Period as 2004 as Cuba's economy had a remarkable (though only partial) rebound.

The time frame for this research extends from 1991 to 2012. These years reflected economic changes that affected rumba audiences, practices, and the community in general. This period also ushered in profound alterations of racial identity in Havana and New York City involving self-identification with African retentions in Latin American and Caribbean cultures. New York City and Havana served as field sites to observe racial performances and identification in the rumba community. The *rumba nueva* that emerged in this period represented a shift in audience, practice and community: staged rumbas for tourists supplanting spontaneous community-oriented rumbas, multi-ethnic participation and discourses of a "global African diasporic family," and Cuban state involvement through official sponsorship, marketing and promotion of the rumba to represent a pluralistic state with Afro-Cuban "roots." Furthermore, during this period, social and economic change in Cuba, mass adoption of Internet social media, and advances in electronic recording technologies – from VHS camcorders to digital handheld recorders and smart phone video recorders – all contributed to alterations in the ways rumba was practiced.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, Cuba's mixed market economy entered global capitalism via tourism and artistic exports during the Special Period (Daniel 1995; Knauer 2009a; Roland 2011; Schwartz 1997; Weinreb 2009; Whittle 1997). The economic changes that affected audiences, practices, and the community as a whole profoundly altered racial identity in Havana and New York City. I utilized an anthropologically grounded, interdisciplinary approach to investigate the ways that

rumberos negotiated their economic circumstances and its relationship to national and diaspora identities in New York City and Havana.

The research time frame was crucial in understanding some of the particularities of the *rumba nueva*. Before the fall of the Soviet Union, Cubans had a relatively high standard of living based on sugar exports, subsidized imports, and oil imports from the Soviet Union (Daniel 1995; Fernandes 2006; Knauer 2009a; 2009b; Hearn 2008; Hernandez-Reguant 2009; Roland 2011). After the collapse in 1989, the Cuban government adopted a dual economy that allowed Cubans to pay for food and necessary products through "national pesos" – a currency limited to domestic exchange. Foreigners, in contrast, were required to use "convertible pesos" – a currency used for international exchange that was originally pegged to the United States dollar. The dual economy supposedly preserved some of the Revolution's goals of egalitarianism while adding much needed funds to the national treasury. My work followed a simple definition of exchange that my interlocutors understood well. They understood that the nation would need to compete within the context of "global capitalism" if some of the benefits of the Revolution were to survive. Rather than graphs showing economic fluctuations, I use the personal relationships I built through ethnography to describe interlocutors' viewpoints and desires for financial stability.

I consider global capitalism as it relates to Cuba as occurring after the fall of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s when capitalism was perceived as having no major competitor as a political-economic system (Dirlik 1994; Jatar-Hausmann 1999;

Kempadoo 1999; Roland 2011). The *rumberos* understood that artistic exchange and participation in global capitalism could possibly bring economic stability to their lives. The increased popularity of Afro-Cuban culture in Canada, the United States, and Europe created an international market for rumba technique classes and Afro-Cuban folkloric performances in general. Many of the *rumberos* I interviewed cited the successful Yoruba Andabo and Los Muñequitos de Matanzas tours as proof that there was an insatiable audience ready to consume all things Afro-Cuban. *Rumberos* believed that dance and percussion classes, performances, and teacher training programs would be the best way for them to benefit from the international popularity of Afro-Cuban art forms.

My knowledge of the rumba was informed by participant observation, participant performance, and my role as the former director of El Fogon Center of the Arts in New York City for two years, from 2011 to 2013. I also conducted formal and informal interviews. Informants for this study included *rumberos*, people that worked at rumbas, scholars of Cuban expressive culture, and people who had knowledge of rumbas in my field sites. I intensely monitored Rumba in NYC, an online Facebook group, for two years from January 2011 to late December 2012. My research in Cuba included a preliminary dissertation research trip in 2008 for two weeks before entering graduate school. I then conducted a total of six and a half months of ethnographic research in Cuba from 2010 to 2012. These field sites were important to my study because they revealed how *rumberos* strategically used social media to connect disparate physical and virtual spaces. Moreover, the three interconnected locations illustrated how transnational travel

influenced the ethnic, national, and racial self-identification practices of *rumberos*. Focusing on the specificities of identity formation in the rumba community illuminated the fluidity and performativity of racial identity.

Participants traveled between New York City and Havana during the course of this research. I started with the spaces where I first met them. As the study progressed, the movement of people, sometimes physical, often times through social media, became increasingly relevant to the study.

My participation in rumbas was more than rum-fueled nights of revelry with some of the most interesting people I have met. As is common in ethnographic research, some of my most insightful experiences came from making social errors. There were numerous times when embarrassment, awkwardness, verbal misunderstandings and the misreading of situations became teachable moments. The social mistakes that initially marked me as a novice in the eyes of *rumberos* helped me gain insights into the multiple performances that took place at the geographic and virtual field sites.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

I arranged this dissertation in loose chronological order to bring clarity to the three main field sites. The Introduction provides a glimpse into the multi-layered, sensory world of the rumba. Key interlocutors entered the narrative to bring legibility to notions of race, space, and transnationality.

Chapter 1 presents the theoretical context of this dissertation and its contributions to scholarly conversations on racial performances, virtual spheres, diasporic identity making, and transnational communication. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the theoretical frameworks for this project and the scholarly lineage of what I call Afro-Latinidad theory. Chapter 3 uses a critical historical perspective that surveys diverse socio-economic viewpoints to describe the past and present. This section provides an outline of socio-cultural periods of the rumba from 1991 to 2012.

Chapter 4 moves directly into the cultural conceptualization and sensorial conception of the rumba by describing the rumba from the perspectives of *rumberos* in Havana. This chapter builds on my argument that the Special Period affected the artistic practices of the rumba. Interviewing the director and members of the Conjuncto Folkloríco Nacional (Cuba's National folkloric company), Rumberos de Cuba, Afro-Rumba, and independent street *rumberos* provided a critical perspective on how tourism, government support, and race influenced the rumba. I speak more about how some *rumberos* use what I call "strategic diaspora" to enter international music and cultural markets. I define strategic diaspora as creating diaspora networks for the primary purpose of enhancing socio-economic status or opportunities.

Chapter 5 describes the *rumba nueva's* tenuous cultural, ethnic, national, and racial boundaries in New York City. This chapter describes how the Giuliani and Koch mayoral terms that addressed "quality of life" initiatives had the reverse affect of

strengthening *rumbero* communities to a certain extent. Just as importantly, this chapter details conflicts between nationalistic and African diaspora beliefs of rumba ownership.

Chapter 6 describes new social media and communication technologies that link New York City and Havana. I describe how race and nationality continue to play a role in authenticity, representation, and what I call a "complicated counter public." This dissertation concludes with a survey of the main points and indicates directions for further research.

Lastly, the conclusion summarizes the narrative, addresses the larger theoretical framework, and argues for the significance of this project from a racial identity perspective. Ethnographic narratives included here illuminate the stories, experiences and sense of place at the field sites. In general, I would like readers to understand how economic conditions, transnational discourses on race, and commodification affect racial identity in physical and virtual spaces. Racial identity is becoming immensely more complicated as new generations grow up in the digital age.

CENTRAL ARGUMENTS

This dissertation addresses three interrelated questions. The first question is how the *rumba nueva* is different from past iterations of the rumba. I addressed this question by recording respondents' opinions on cultural and performance changes in rumbas in Havana and New York City, and by drawing from conversations in the Facebook community group. *Rumberos*' narratives provided the historical context that I used to

describe economic, cultural and identity changes that took place during and before the Special Period. These narratives describe the practices and communities surrounding the rumba as a cultural form: staged rumbas for tourists supplanting spontaneous community-oriented rumbas, multi-ethnic participation and discourses of a transnational African diasporic family, and Cuban state involvement through official sponsorship, marketing and promotion of the rumba to represent a pluralistic state with Afro-Cuban roots.

The second question addresses the fluid patchwork of ethnicities, skin tones, nationalities and systems of racial designation. Question two is: What does the *rumba nueva* tell us about shifting national, ethnic and racial affiliations and the Afro-Cuban diaspora? This question places this work in conversation with scholars that research how racial identity and understanding is not just (forgive the pun) "black and white." The tensions between a nationalistic like ownership of rumba by Cubans in Havana and New York City contrasts the beliefs of a complicated, inclusive African Diaspora established on cultural beliefs and ethnic background that I experienced in New York City. My scholarly contribution is specifically connected to anthropologists and Performance Studies theorists (e.g., Alexander, 2005; Browning 1995; Johnson 2003) that look at what I call the deviousness of race – the thesis that race is received and perceived differently based on location, audience and time (Hartigan 2010; Jackson 2001; Kutzinski 1993; Sarduy & Stubbs1993; Roland 2011).

Even though many of my Cuban respondents declared, "*el color no importa*" (skin color doesn't matter), they nevertheless perceived of rumba as a dance form that

reportedly shows *blackness* while simultaneously celebrating Cuban culture. The critical tourism and race work of scholars such as Roland (2011), Sawyer (2006), Cheong & Miller (2009), Cohen (1995), Cheong and Miller (2000), Gregory (2003), Kempadoo (1999), Schwartz (1997), and Whittle (1997) provided the foundation to theorize race as a malleable concept that is contested and sometimes even reified by those who fight to free themselves from this ubiquitous social construct. The works of Jackson (2001) and Hartigan (1999) helped me see how actors strategically employ racial signifiers to navigate their worlds. My theorization of *strategic diaspora* also interrogates how space influences racial belief systems.

Other researchers have shown how location, behavior, and other performances inform racial designation. Jackson described how Harlemites talk, stand, wear their clothing, and style their hair in specific ways to claim authenticity in the community (Jackson 2001, 148). As a point of contrast, Hartigan looked at "whiteness" as middle-class norms such as education, liberal political views and geography in Detroit. He described how whiteness is not a static concept solely dependent on skin color. His work was particularly helpful as New York City spaces of class, ethnic, and national differences created combustible spaces at rumbas.

Issues of race proved relevant to this study, even though I often recorded conflicting racial beliefs among interlocutors. Nonetheless, while views of race differed among individuals, the experience of physical (law enforcement harassment of colored bodies), gendered, (minimal to extreme marginalization of female participants),

sexualized, and verbal violence remains a constant of structural racism affecting the African diaspora in the Western Hemisphere (Andrews 2004; Asante 1994; Fanon 1967; Klein 1971; Smith 2005, 2013). This dissertation presents a broad narrative that shows flexibility and variance in the social realities of classifying people by race. Narratives, verbal as well as embodied, provided evidence of the ways *rumberos* self-identified strategically. Participant observation, participant performance, performance ethnography, and interviews supplemented data disseminated in the form of narrative throughout this dissertation.

The final question that this research addressed was how the economic conditions of rumba audiences and communities profoundly altered identities and affiliations in Havana and New York City. I gathered data on this question by using formal and informal interviews. I found that questions of racial membership were significantly complicated by access to Internet social media. People could access rumbas without physically being present. Light skinned foreigners who were not skilled in the rumba could access intimate spaces where they may not have been welcomed otherwise. Or as I witnessed through participant observation, Canadian and European women would be approached by *rumberos* attempting to act as guides for economic or social gain in the trying times of pre- and post-Special Period Cuba.[4]

4 A *luchador* is a Cuban man or women who connect tourists with goods or services or enters a romantic relationship with a foreigner. It is assumed that the *luchador/a* will benefit from the relationship in some way.

Systematic video analysis was key to charting transnational communication and interpretation of views of identity and race. “Native born North Americans in New York” and “Cubans in Havana” were the designations I used during the initial stages of this project. Movement, immigration, migration during the Special Period (and beyond) and gentrification of some New York City neighborhoods obscured this simplistic model. Monitoring videos where I was an active participant provided details into the daily conversations that took place in the virtual sphere. By accessing Facebook, I was able to analyze digital video media (DVMAR) (Hong & Tian 1995, 643). I monitored the content of written of posts, comments and discussions on audio video media posted on walls. My media monitoring analysis included shots, scenes, sequences, and segments (Hong & Tian ibid). Some of the videos were edited to focus on specific drumming techniques.

To be clear, I used terminology commonly used in media studies (Androutsopoulos 2006; Auslander 2008; Lave & Wenger 1991; Livingstone & Markham 2008; Pink 2007; Troianovski 2013; Hong & Tian 1995). Methodologically my explanation of media approaches follows Zhang & Tian, who remarked, “A shot is a sequence of image frames recorded contiguously and representing a continuous action in time and space. One or more adjoining shots focusing on an object or objects of interest can form a scene. Several scenes can be combined into a sequence or segment on the basis of some semantic significance” (1995, 643). Using media studies methods helped me theorize mediated representations of identity, race, and space on the Facebook group.

I reviewed my assumptions by asking *rumberos* the significance of the Facebook group through electronic interviews and face-to-face communication. I noted the location where the respondents viewed the media, the electronic device used to access the Facebook group, the racial self-identity of the viewer, where the media was recorded (if it was uploaded to the Rumba in NYC Facebook group), and the people who discussed the media in a comments section. The field sites may then be divided into three interrelated locations: Havana, New York City, and Facebook. The systematic documentation of discussions, media posters, commenters, and interpretations revealed a different reality where *rumberos* from the States have used the greater accessibility of electronics to connect with their counterparts in Havana.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON CUBAN/AFRICAN DIASPORA RACIAL FLUIDITY

A brief reference to my theoretical framework is helpful in situating this project among scholars that discuss the African diaspora, identity, performance and race. Racial fluidity in Havana, in New York City and on the Facebook page was an important aspect of identity formation in this research project. My theoretical framework drew largely from scholarly research that resists essential notions of race and identity.

African Diaspora, Performance, and Latinidad theories were most helpful in unpacking the complex identities of rumberos in New York City and Havana. African Diaspora theory proved important for this research through its analysis of the historic, political, imagined, complicated and fractured identities of people of African descent

outside of continental Africa (Alexander 2005; Gordon 1998, 2007; Fordham 1986; Gracia 2000; Gregory 1994; Jackson 2001, 2010; Lacy 2007, 2007; Lipsitz 1998; Omi & Winant 1986). Building on Guridy's work (2010), I am interested in the different ways *rumberos* forge diaspora communities. My theoretical framework was based on the study of transnational relationships – looking at the relationships between performance and Internet communication in the forging of diasporic communities.

In theorizing the nationalization and commodification of Afro-Cuban art forms and black identity, I drew upon the ethnomusicology work of Robin Moore (1997, 2006). My analysis of cultural artistic production and race in New York City was further informed by Boggs's (1992) work on Afro-Cuban music and salsa in the 1990s. The growing popularity of the rumba outside of marginalized, communities of color in some ways mirrors the rise of salsa in New York City. A main difference is that the rumba does not have a downtown New York venue as large and grand as the now-closed classic Palladium nightclub on 53rd and Broadway. A theoretical focus on representation, diaspora and transnational anti-essentialist conceptions of race theorizes the socio-cultural changes in Havana and New York City.

TRANSNATIONALISM AND RACIAL IDENTIFICATIONS

Cohen (1997) provided a succinct definition to use as a foundation for analysis of global capitalism, race, the construction of a "home," and virtual movement. Cohen's models provided a foundation for the economic and migratory analysis that I incorporated

in this dissertation. Cohen (1997, 515) wrote of a collective memory and myth about the homeland, an idealization of the putative ancestral home, the development of a return movement that gains collective approbation, a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a common history, and a sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement. His research provides an understanding of migration and the economic effects of travel. I depart from his work by looking at the personal choices made by actors viewed through a lens of cultural production.

This dissertation draws on Cohen to make connections between race and economic access. Many of my Havana interlocutors saw their racially distinctive bodies as a birthright that strengthened their ability to present Afro-Cuban art forms "authentically." One of the downsides of their racial identification, I learned, was that many understood "professionalism" and beauty in terms of Western European aesthetics. The tension between racial fluidity and beliefs of fixed racial characteristics was common in the field sites for this dissertation.

LINKING VIRTUAL RACE AND PERFORMANCE IN THE *RUMBA NUEVA*

The *rumba nueva* has been an uneasy melding of artistic production, cultural diaspora formation, tourist expectations and technology. I believe the *rumba nueva* is a new iteration of the rumba for three reasons:

1. Increased access to Internet technology allows *rumberos* in New York and Havana to traverse physical borders virtually.

2. Rumberos are able to perform in physical spaces and transmit these performances globally. They spread the rumba internationally even when they are not physically present in those spaces.
3. The global rumba community is a multi-ethnic, transnational body connected by practicing the rumba. The rumba is a cultural diaspora that links different ethnicities, nationalities, and socially constructed racial designations.

FURTHER ETHNOGRAPHICALLY INFORMED CONTEXT OF THE RUMBA NUEVA

This section provides precise, brief explanations of the four components of what I define as the *rumba nueva*. By looking at transnational communication through social media, staged versus informal rumbas, ethnic diversity and the narrative of a cultural African diaspora, government involvement, and linking virtual race and performance, my arguments become clearer. More information on these sections can be found in Chapters 3 through 6.

Part 1: Transnational Communication through Social Media

Transnational communication facilitated through social media has been an aspect of the culture of *rumba nueva*. Earlier scholars have noted remittances as byproducts of the immigration experience (Aguirre 1976; Al-Ali & Koser 2001; Eckerstein & Barberia 2002; Horevitz 2009). Knauer went further to discuss how some families used video recordings to connect with families and friends abroad (Knauer 2009b). I argue that regular transnational communication has been difficult for Cubans and that social media

is an avenue, albeit a difficult one, through which to communicate. The United States embargo has made regular travel between the United States and Havana difficult (Aguirre 1976; Eckerstein, Susan, and Barberia 2002). In general, Cubans have accessed Internet social media through illegal connections in their homes, on government office computers, in hotels (through foreign guests), and through phones that were serviced by non-U.S. telecommunication companies. Cubans used these devices for email and accessing websites for communication with family and friends.

Part 2: Staged Versus Informal Performance in the *Rumba Nueva*

The ways the rumbas are performed convey how performance, practice and community have changed in response to the economic changes during the era of the *rumba nueva*. Earlier performances of the rumba included improvisational street performances that the government treated as nothing more than a nuisance that could spiral out of control (Daniel 1995). Both staged and informal rumbas have been an integral part of the *rumba nueva*. Staged rumbas are rumbas that are official, government-sanctioned events. Rumba groups that are officially sponsored present government-prescribed Afro-Cuban culture to even the most geographically remote communities in Cuba (Daniel 1995). In contrast, informal rumbas are not regulated and thus need not submit to the formalized performance structures of the rumbas that are sponsored by the Cuban government or businesses such as hotels. This dissertation describes these divergent practices of the rumba art making.

Professional Cuban rumba groups – like Cutumba, Conjunto Folklórico Nacional de Cuba, Folklórico Oriente, Yoruba Andabo, Rumberos de Cuba, Clave y Guaguanco – all have stage programs that demonstrate their artistic prowess to seated audiences. I observed classes, rehearsals and performances, and I took private classes and conducted interviews with the national company Conjunto Folklórico Nacional. I conducted participant observation with the regional groups Ballet Camagüey, Cutumba, and Folkloríco de Oriente. Furthermore, I also worked with *rumberos* who formed their own traditional groups like Afro-Rumba. I had the opportunity to research staged and informal rumbas by working with both *rumberos* employed by the government, played independently for money, or played at events for free.

Part 3: Ethnic Diversity and the Narrative of a Cultural African Diaspora

I have looked at the ethnic diversity and creations of cultural diaspora aspects of the *rumba nueva* through what I theorize as a re-creations of home. The site of the rumba is a manifestation of several different re-creations of home or places of origin. Home could be a geographic location for the rumba community. *Rumberos* referenced Cuba and Puerto Rico the most at New York City rumbas. Home can also be an imagined space like an imagined Africa as a place of origin for multi-ethnic groups of rumberos (Alexander 2005; Gordon 1998; Gordon & Anderson 1999). The combination of geographic and symbolic spaces creates a notion of a cultural diaspora that Guridy calls "diasporic identities" (Guridy 2010). In conversation with Guridy, I have concluded that the symbols of *home* are important clues on racial and national identity.

Part 4: Government Involvement in the *Rumba Nueva*

Government involvement in the rumba has been an important aspect of the formation of the rumba since the Revolution. In Cuba, government prohibition, surveillance, policing and control have been part of the narrative of Afro-Cuban participation in the Cuban state (Jottar 2009, 4; Moore 1998; Sarduy & Stubbs 1993; Sarduy & Stubbs 2000). Much of the regulation was concentrated on secular (rumba, conga, etc.) and religious (Santería, palo, etc.) expressive culture. After the 1959 Revolution, the Cuban government used folkloric art forms to show a more complete picture of Cuban diversity. The Cuban government felt that it was necessary to show solidarity with the large underclass of workers and Cubans of African descent in order to impress upon them that their needs were being met. The rumba was symbolic of the rural and urban working class that had been part Fidel's base of support during the early days of the Revolution (Fernandes 2006).

Agreeing with Daniel (1995), I understand that racial inclusiveness would be an important part maintaining support for the Revolution. My interlocutors referred to the famous Afro-Cuban general Antonio Maceo and his army of *mambises*[8] that liberated Cuba. Similarly, when talking about their devotion to Cuba, some *rumberos* believed that the Revolution would not be successful if it was not for the poor, who were overwhelmingly Cubans of African descent. In *Sociedades de Negros* (Societies of Blacks), Godfried (2000) described how clubs for whites and blacks were abolished after the Revolution between 1961 and 1962. I raise this example to explain how race, the

Cuban nation and the government have been distinct forces in shaping the political discourses that happen in rumba spaces. Overt political discussions were rare in Havana and New York City. Those political discussions that did arise on occasion mostly centered on the centrality of Cubans of African descent in independence struggles and artistic creation.

NEW YORK CITY: SITES AND PARTICIPANTS

In New York, I formally interviewed 25 *rumberos* for this project. I spoke to numerous others during the course of traveling to many rumbas in Manhattan, Bronx, Brooklyn, and to a few in Queens. New York City can be divided into smaller neighborhoods and boroughs. These smaller units of space add specificity to individual rumbas in the city. The strong Puerto Rican relationships to the neighborhoods of the Lower East Side, East Harlem (affectionately called *El Barrio* by residents), and certain Bronx neighborhoods influenced the occasional conflicts between *rumberos* of different nationalities or ethnicities in NYC. My conceptualization of New York City as more than a single unified space added contextual considerations to my descriptive analysis.

In New York City, rumbas took place in communities with large numbers of Puerto Ricans, Cubans of African descent, and Latinos. The Lower East Side, Spanish Harlem, and the Bronx were places where formal and informal rumbas were held. Within these neighborhoods, I conducted participant observation at the following locales: Friday rumbas at El Fogon Center of the Arts in the Bronx, Sunday Rumbas at Central Park

during the summer months, Sunday rumbas at the Brecht Forum during the winter months, La Esquina Habanera in New Jersey, folkloric dance workshops taught by Danys “La Mora” Perez at the Alvin Ailey Extension in Manhattan, Cuban cultural events at the Bronx Museum, Rumbas in the New York City’s Lower East Side, Special rumba workshops by Los Muñequitos de Matanzas, Ballet Cutumba, and Havana born dancer/choreographer Maykel Fonts during his North American tour. I will describe these locations and the *rumberos* that brought life to these spaces.

HAVANA: SITES AND PARTICIPANTS

The New York City-based *rumberos* understood that Cuba was the birthplace of the rumba. Artistic movements that started in Havana would make their way to New York City through the immigration of Cuban rumberos, such as Manuel Martínez Olivera "El Llanero" bringing the *guarapachanguero*[9] style of rumba drumming to New York City urging his departure from Cuba during the Mariel Boatlift (Jottar 2009).

I worked with 20 informants during the Havana portion of this research project. Informants included professional *rumberos*, *rumberos* that played primarily for tourists, *rumberos* that had not been trained in Cuba’s arts schools, arts administrators, and Cubans who had knowledge of the socio-cultural significance of the rumba. These informants were able to explain the visceral difficulty of living in Cuba during the Special Period. Their national and racial perspectives of their work brought a unique perspective to my theorizing of the rumba that was markedly different than my NYC

based interlocutors. Since I was studying a relatively long span of time, these *rumberos* provided a more holistic view of the transnational flows of the rumba to this project. I will discuss these spaces and rumberos more in depth in the chapter on the *rumba nueva* in Havana.

Havana has cultural spaces dedicated specifically for the performance of rumba and folkloric performances. I note that Havana and New York City are not completely separate entities. I met some *rumberos* in New York City and would also see them at public performances in Cuba. The field sites in Cuba were: The Barrio Chino neighborhood, Old Havana, the Gran Palenque, Malecón in downtown Havana, Casa del Yoruba, Callejón de Hamel, numerous clubs, and patios, living rooms, and apartment plazas when traveling in Havana with Afro-Rumba.

INTERVIEW METHODS

In addition to formal interviews, I conducted many informal interviews with informants with whom I had developed a rapport. These included ongoing conversations with professional musicians, street performers, enthusiasts, and amateur *rumberos*. Some recurring themes that came out of these conversations include: artistic skill level, racial / ethnic identification, Cuban nationality as a claim to a higher level of authenticity, and social norms related to the rumba culture. This last category included notions on “correct” ways of speaking, gender roles, and government sanctioning of “acceptable” performances. Through interviews and participant observation, I arrived at new themes

that guided my subsequent research. The perspectives of my informants helped me look at salient ideas that were important in their communities.

CONCLUSION

The development of the *rumba nueva* represents an important period of unprecedented change in the Cuban rumba. The collapse of the Soviet Union irrevocably changed the Cuban economy. *Socialismo o muerte* (socialism or death) became a popular, official phrase that signified the state's attempt to maintain a socialist system despite the loss of economic subsidies formerly provided by the Soviet Union. Performances of the rumba and other Afro-Cuban art forms became a way for Cubans of African descent to make much needed US dollars and convertible pesos (CUC) during the Special Period. With the documented marginalization of darker Cubans from economically profitable Special Period and Post-Special Period professions in the hotel and service industries (Fernandes 2006; Roland 2011; Schwartz 1997; Whittle 1997), performing rumba at a high level was an avenue to make money. The economic changes affected how *rumberos* performed for audiences, the venues, the performance lengths, and the social connections. The economic changes in Cuba affected the New York City rumba communities. *Rumberos* seeking to escape the economic difficulties of the Special Period immigrated to Cuba. The Cuban government's marketing of rumba as an art form that demonstrated African aspects of Cuban culture affected the racial and ethnic definition of rumberos in New York City. This dissertation documents how racial performances change depending on physical and virtual spaces.

Chapter 2 Afro-Latinidad Theory

This chapter situates Afro-Latinidad theory firmly within contemporary scholarship in the disciplines of cultural anthropology, African Diaspora studies, and Performance studies. I use theory to succinctly describe an understanding of an African diaspora that is heavily influenced by performance and by local and transnational virtual communication. Rather than an exhaustive literature review, I include some of the most important concepts that I found useful while conducting participant observation.

An Intersectional Framework that Addresses Theory and Practice

Generally, Afro-Latinidad theory is a contemporary understanding of African diaspora theory that provides a framework to understand performance in physical and virtual spaces. Afro-Latinidad theory centers the cultural retentions, desires, imaginations, and identity self-making practices of participants of different national backgrounds. A key aspect of Afro-Latinidad theory is cultural hybridization. Hybridic urban styles of dress, music, language, graphic arts, and other collective forms of group identification generate cultural innovation through the juxtaposition and fusion of cultural memes. I use Cultural studies scholar Juan Flores' work to provide a succinct description of how I employ Afro-Latinidad theory in Havana and New York City field sites. Afro-Latinidad theory is "a way of naming the kind of cultural fusion and hybridization typical of highly diasporic urban settings in the metropolis (Flores 2000, 4)."

I utilize theoretical frameworks that incorporate distinctions of race, class, ethnic, nationality, and performance to support the ethnographic chapters that follow. Viewing the *rumba nueva* through the lens of African diasporic artistic expressive practices provides a constructive way of understanding knowledge production, identity formation, and transnational beliefs. This chapter begins with a description of African Diaspora theory that is expansive enough to assess the sociopolitical consequences of African diaspora groups that may not look "black" or even have Sub-Saharan ancestry. I then chart essentialist and anti-essentialist theorizations of race to explore the various ways *rumberos* employ race in different spaces.

From there, I use the work of performance theorists to describe interactions on performance stages and the boisterous, animated spaces of the rumba. I conclude by incorporating insights from anthropologists Katherine Dunham and Pearl Primus to justify the ways I used participant observation and performance participation to theorize identity and race in rumba spaces. I expand on their performance ethnography work by including current technological innovations to performance practices.

INFLUENTIAL THEORISTS USED IN AFRO-LATINIDAD THEORY

Latinidad theory is a helpful (although at times problematic), theoretical framework that was useful while conducting ethnographic research. *Rumberos* often referred to themselves as Latino, "Spanish[5]", Hispanic, by nationality, or sometimes by

5 Some Puerto Ricans and Puerto Rican *rumberos* in New York City used this term when referring to themselves.

ancestral country of origin. The work of scholars that look at the socioeconomic complexities of Latino spaces offered a good starting point for understanding the ways *rumberos* self-identified (Dávila 2001, 2008; Delgado, Fraser & Munoz 1997; Gracia 2000; González 2010). Through fieldwork, I came to realize that the blanket term of "Latino" and the focus of Latino studies on class and national differences did not suffice in explaining the complex realities of Latinos that described themselves, or were described by others, as having some Sub-Saharan African ancestry. For example, during fieldwork, *mulatto* (mixed black and white ancestry), *prieto* (a very dark skinned black person), or *trigueño* (a very light skinned, straight haired person with African ancestry) were commonly used terms.

Focusing solely on informants' socioeconomic conditions did not express the realities of their experiences as African descendants. Dávila adeptly describes United States representations of Latinos that excludes brown bodies, among others (2001, 2008). Theorizing these as simply "Latino" spaces when pronouncements to African derivative cultural practices and performances of racial authenticity were very strong in rumba spaces.

Rather than placing the experiences of these "Afro-Latinos" or people of African descent as people on the margins of what it means to be conceptualized as "Latino" (Perez, Sarduy and Stubbs 1993, 2000; Serra 2007; Sawyer 2006), I use what I call Afro-Latinidad theory to critically examine their unique belief systems, performance styles and sensibilities. This theoretical framework that encompasses a broad range of phenotypes,

is grounded in my ethnographic experiences of hearing the casual usage of Afro-Latino, Afro-Cuban, black, *negro, negrito*[6]*, mulatto*, and numerous other terms to describe a broad range of people of African descent in rumba spaces. This theoretical framework helps me assess what it means to have a complicated identity where racial, economic, national, and transnational African diaspora belief systems are in constant conversation.

I position Afro-Latinidad theory in conversation with scholars that theorize "diasporic identity" (Gordon and Anderson 1999; Gordon 1998; Guridy 2010; Gomez 2005; Jottar 2009, 2011), with specific attention to artistic spaces of cultural production. In agreement with Andrews (2004), I contend that Latinidad theory generally places African cultural practices as unrefined *roots* of some Caribbean nations while denying the evolution of Afro-Latino people (Dávila 2001, 2008; De la Fuente 2001; Flores 2000; Gracia 2000). As stated before, rather than placing Latinos of African descent at the margins of Spanish- and mestizo-centric ideologies, Afro-Latinidad theory places divergent views of interlocutors that actively reconstruct and construct the "African" in national, individual, and racial identities.

Flores's (2000) *From Bomba to Hip-Hop* described the transformations, fusions, hybrid spaces and innovations in Puerto Rican and Latino communities in the United States. My theoretical framework builds upon Flores's descriptions of how Latinos use an amalgam of national histories, racial understandings and alliances to create hybrid

6 Often used as an affectionate term for a black person. I heard this term more often in Cuba, but Cuban and Puerto Rican *rumberos* also used this term of endearment for friends and *rumberos* of the past.

identities. I witnessed *rumberos* employ these hybrid identities to their advantage in and out of performance spaces. Roland's (2011) work on tourism, race and commodification helped me looked at the strategic ways subjects use expressive culture to redefine racial discourses. My working of Afro-Latinidad theory includes racial, gendered, sexualized and class representations of African descendants and non-African descendants that practice those cultural traditions.

I was further influenced in my theorization of race and identity by Gordon and Anderson (1999), who looked at African cultural retentions and self-making discourses. Thus, my theorization of Afro-Latino identity recognizes the economic, social, racial and cultural belief systems rooted in an anti-essentialist representation of the self. This model claims that Cuban racial belief systems are negotiated, contextualized and theorized between the United States and Cuba.

Guridy's (2010) descriptions of Cuban and North American relationships from Cubans attending Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute, the international appeal of Garveyism, artistic sharing between Havana and Harlem during the Harlem Renaissance, *Afrocubanismo* movement[7], the United States occupation of Cuba, the Good Neighbor policy, and travel networks during the Cold War era showed the depth of African-American and Afro-Cuban conversations. My work complements this transnational understanding of race by looking at how virtual encounters are the contemporary spaces for transnational racial dialogues. Afro-Latinidad theory assesses how diverse groups

7 The movement in black-themed Cuban culture, originating in the 1920s

forge connections despite different national histories. A main part of this work aims to tease out the intimacy of race and diaspora between the ethnographic sites.

The theoretical framework of this dissertation is grounded in technology and transnational flows of people of African descent. The transnational flows that facilitated relationships between Cubans and Africans Americans can now be facilitated through video media and the Internet (Knauer 2009a, 2009b; Jottar 2011). Race does not vanish when social media and video disembody the body (Everett 2009). Employing theories that examine how people form online identities (Allen 2009; Cohen 1997; Androutsopoulos 2006; Brinkerhoff 2009; Oiarzabal 2006; Gillian 2006; Horowitz 1971; Karim 2003; Mitra 2001; Pink 2007; Tillman 1999; Tsaliki 2003), I am able to theorize how the racialized bodies of *rumberos* transfer to the virtual world through media.

Everett (2009) noted that the Internet is a social medium that connects diverse groups, fosters community and reproduces African and African diaspora communities. I enter the scholarly conversation on race and media by adding specificity to uses of the Internet among the African diaspora. National and ethnic histories influence how *rumberos* interact online. My work provides the theoretical tools to analyze how race and cultural production are transmitted globally through Internet social media.

AFRICAN DIASPORA THEORY GROUNDED IN PERFORMANCE

African Diaspora theory is central to this dissertation project and the construction of Afro-Latinidad theory. Interlocutors in New York City and Havana expressed African

diasporic beliefs in terms of unchanged African cultural retentions present in the Americas, hybridized cultural practices from enslaved Africans and their descendants, transnational political affiliations based on race, innate personality characteristics exhibited by people of African descent, or a cultural affinity to cultural practices created or influenced by people of African descent. Social media complicated claims of "authenticity" in relation to the African diaspora. Informants in the Havana and New York City field sites shared notions of African diaspora, and discourses in the virtual communities further advanced the narrative.

My understanding of the African diaspora utilizes various schools of thought to synthesize the various belief systems I encountered in the field. My conceptualization of the African diaspora begins with the physical dispersal of people from an original homeland (Herskovits 1941). The institutional legacies of racism, segregation, and discrimination have helped create distinct African diaspora communities (Cohen 2004; Combahee River Collective 1978; James and Gordon 2007; Neal 1968; Padmore 1956; Vargas 2007). I argue that the cultural mix that New York and Havana interlocutors celebrated as porous, sometimes abstract groupings is dependent on the cultural retentions of enslaved Africans and their descendants in the Americas.

A clear definition of diaspora provides the foundation for an inclusive framework that includes both physical and virtual diasporas in this project. The African diaspora denotes a type of identity formation where racial and cultural hybridization merges different cultural values into a new, unique entity that transcends national borders. This was particularly useful as the more national oriented Cuban *rumberos* came into contact

with generations of different New York City based Puerto Rican *rumberos* who used the rumba as their space to fashion African diaspora and Puerto Rican identities (Jottar 2011).

The Rumba in NYC group and the growing popularity of the rumba in New York City destabilized those who claimed Puerto Rican and Cuban “ownership” of New York City rumbas. Gordon’s term “diasporic identification” usefully incorporates a psychological level of self-affiliation to help theorize the racial, ethnic, and ideological difference within the African diaspora (1998). The concept of diasporic identification provides a framework for exploring the unique ways diaspora communities identify themselves in relation to history, region, language, and neighboring groups. By recognizing the diversity within the rumba community and the different ways *rumberos* are initiated into the community, diasporic identification resists top-down categorizing that disregards the ways individuals self-identify.

Dubois’s research (1973; 2001) provides the theoretical justifications that prove that enslaved Africans maintained some of their cultural practices during the Atlantic slave trade and colonial period in the Americas. Dubois’s work is important for this dissertation due to how he recorded how Africans and African descendants actively made transnational alliances that had political, military, and cultural outcomes. As the “Father of Pan-Africanism” and scholar that situated Pan-Africanism political and intellectual thought within third-world anti-colonial struggles (Padmore 1956), Dubois assumed that black intellectual and political elite would lead the masses out of an intellectual quagmire caused by slavery, colonialization, and acquisition of Africa’s natural resources (ibid). I

am most interested in Dubois's reasoning on cultural retentions and transnational borrowings that are transferred between physical locations. Afro-Latinidad theory addresses what is gained and lost when these transnational borrowings happen.

Most *rumberos/as* who used the word "African diaspora" were college educated. Dubois' belief in a "talented tenth" demonstrates the class bias in early scholarly theorization of Africans, African-Americans, and the African diaspora. Moreover, Dubois' early political interventions through transnational solidarity movements resonated with African leaders and African-American intellectual elite. Pan-Africanism never received the same mass appeal as popular movements like Garvey's Back-to Africa movement. Similar to Pan-Africanism, African Diaspora studies/theory does not have broad, multi-class participation (Kelly 2000). On the ground in Havana and New York City, professional *rumberos* and government employed cultural workers believed that they were part of a vanguard that were going to change the way Latinos thought of African derived aspects of their identities. They did, of course, place a price tag on the cultural performances that would help shift what it means to be Latino.

It is useful to have a strong, robust diaspora theoretical framework due to the fact that a large part of the community in New York City were immigrants or second or third generation Americans of immigrant parents. Cohen (1997) describes seven criteria for proper usage of diaspora for a group. These are: "dispersal and scattering," "collective trauma," "cultural flowering," "troubled relationships with the majority," "sense of community," "transcending national frontiers," and "promoting a return movement"

(Cohen ibid). Cohen's broad definitions give me the space to theorize the disparate characters that participate in rumba spaces.

Using African diaspora and Afro-Latinidad theory, I address performance, diaspora, and particularities of space in reference to racial constructs. I begin with Edward Telle's (2006) theory of racial inequality is useful because it analyzes race as a social construction. This view does not get bogged down by trying to define who actually is "black," as there is an array of terms that describe a person's racial category in different social contexts. Nevertheless, it helps me addresses law enforcement, state surveillance of colored bodies, education institutions, racial prejudice, and political representation cross culturally. It is a helpful addition to Jackson's (2001) description of race as "slippery" and multi-dimensional.

Telles's *Race in Another America* (2006) gives three important examples and connections in the African diaspora across countries in the Western hemisphere. These categories are: hyper-inequality," the "glass ceiling," and the "façade of racial democracy." These three concepts provide a valuable way to examine race across national borders, and I found them helpful in exploring the multiracial construct of the rumba.

Briefly expanding on these three concepts, *hyper-inequality* is unequal material wealth and access to social capital, which affects access to education, health care, ownership of property, and accessing the legal system. The *glass ceiling* is an institutional barrier that circumscribes the professional possibilities of people of African descent. The glass ceiling circumscribes the economic possibilities of Afro-descendants.

Chasteen's *National Rhythms, African Roots: The Deep History of Latin American Popular Dance* (2004) looks at how the glass ceiling limits the education and training of musicians of African descent living in the Americas. Finally, borrowing from Dixon (2006), there is the *façade of racial democracy* that is present in African diaspora communities. Dixon notes:

> Third, there is the façade of a racial democracy or a country that incorporates all its citizens. Through media practices that deny racial discrimination while maintaining unequal access to resources, racial or more specifically color inequality continues (Dixon ibid, 251).

Used mostly in reference Brazil, this phrase can un-problematically be applied to Cuba as well (Gomez 2005). Some of my interlocutors' beliefs that racism did not exist in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, or Puerto Rico speaks strongly in support of Dixon's work. Although numerous scholars testify that race and racism is alive and well in the Caribbean (Allen 2009, 2011; De la Fuente 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001; Domínguez 1997; Bronfman 2004; Sarduy, Perez and Stubbs 1993; Sarduy, Perez and Stubbs 2000; Sawyer 2006), I situate disparate voices in conversation to present a holistic view of the rumba community. Some interlocutors dismissed race and said inequality in Havana or NYC was class based. I document their assumptions but still address how race, class, gender, and geographic location intersect and complicate notions of access. Spending extended amounts of time in the field sites helped me look at what interlocutors said and the social realities they actually experienced.

THE AFRICAN DIASPORA AND RACE

Afro-Latinidad theory provides an intersectional, diffuse notion of race. I draw upon scholarship that provides the opportunity to look at the African diaspora from a lens of race. In Havana, Cubans talked about a Cuban diaspora living abroad that (sometimes) sent remittances. Havana interlocutors spoke of an African diaspora in terms of culture and sometimes race, but conversations about the Cuban diaspora were much more common. In New York City, interlocutors spoke of a transnational African diaspora connected by African ancestry.

Even with differences of connectivity, it was intriguing that New York City and Havana interlocutors believed they knew the immutable characteristics of what they perceived to be blackness. Omi and Winant argue that racialization ‘‘refers to the process by which social, economic, and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turn shaped by racial meanings’’ (1986, 61). Racialization and theory replaces discredited stances that declare the unbreakable bond between race, biology, and actions. Looking more closely, Brackette Williams (1991) broadens the scope of racialization by investigating how nation building and the remnants of colonial governments reproduces ethnic chauvinism, racial stereotyping, and religious bigotry.

My theory builds upon this scholarship by looking at how images and performances of the rumba confer knowledge about representations of blackness (Moore 1997). My theoretical framework looks at variant constructs of racial identity that

traverses national borders. The social processes that places racial significance on certain actions adds an important analytic dimension to the theoretical analysis of race.

THEORIZING RACIAL ESSENTIALISM IN THE RUMBA NUEVA

Rumberos in Havana and New York City often discussed the rumba in terms of racial essentialism. Facebook commentators, social researchers, art scholars, artists, and rumba enthusiasts generally agree that the rumba is a black cultural practice retained from an African original. Herskovitz's (1990) work supports this viewpoint that I heard at some Havana staged rumbas for tourists and sometimes among New York City *rumberos*. Hersksovitz examined African "cultural survivals" as a way to prove the connections between Africa and its diaspora. Herskzovitz's scholarship connected Africa and its communities through cultural commonalities. He argued that West African cultural traits could be found, to varying degrees, in the Americas.

Although Herskovitz was a leading proponent of acculturation theory, he classified certain African descended groups based on the African traits he believed they exemplified. Future research will examine how *rumberos* interpret Herskovitz's idea of culture transmissions from continental Africa. In Chapter 3, I explore the topic of historical survivals and cultural change in the rumba in greater depth.

There are aspects of Herskovitz's scholarship that I do not include in Afro-Latinidad theory. Herskovitz does not emphasize the cultural evolution of continental African cultures. The trans-Atlantic slave trade, European colonialization, migrations, and general cultural change made it impossible to find an African culture that has not changed in the

last 500 years. Furthermore, Herskovitz does not look at the ways African tribes restructured their cultural practices based on anti-colonial nationalism. Some of Herskovitz's theories were problematic because of his underlying assumption that continental African cultures are static. "African culture" is actually a cacophony of porous, evolving cultures. Even before the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, Arab, Greek, Indian, and European cultures influenced African societies. Cultures are not neat bundles, easily labeled by scholars. Finally, Herskovitz's theory appealed to an outdated model of human social evolution that wrongly inferred that African diaspora cultures were superior to African cultures due to evolutionary development.

The work of Molefi Kete Asante (1994) helps me theorize the possible motivations, rationale, and political consequences of *rumberos*' strategic racial essentializing performance practices. The need to center black subjectivities juxtaposed to the policing of what is and is not authentic rumba for prestige or economic interests. Asante uses intentional essentialism as a way to create a centeredness that places African and African descended identity at the intellectual axis (1994). Influential *rumberos* Roman Diaz, Pupy, and Pedrito Martinez provide interesting clues on *rumberos*' perspectives. Their rumbas were peppered with references to "Mother Africa."

Africa was imagined as an unchanging, static home that informed their cultural practices. The flick of a hand mixed with a gyration of the hips was "African" according to Pupy in a passionate speech he gave to his Friday night rumba classes. The syncopation of staccato stumping feet was proclaimed "African" by Badero from the Los Muñequitos de Matanzas while giving a workshop in upper Manhattan during their 2011

United States tour (workshop dance lecture, May 6, 2011). Asante's work illuminates how these *rumberos* conceptualize history that centers working class Afro-Cuban perspectives. Complicating the notion of strategic essentializing, there are economic benefits for describing a movement as "authentic", "African", or "Afro-Cuban". Tourists looking for "authentic" Afro-Cuban culture, in search of the exotic, or solidarity with Africa and its diaspora were sources of income for *rumberos*. I will explore these and other strategic reasons for diasporic ideologies in the following chapters.

THEORIZING ANTI-ESSENTIALIST AFRICAN DIASPORA AND RACIAL BELIEFS IN THE FIELD

Anti-essentialist theories of race that describe the fluidity of race are the backbone of my theorization on race and diaspora. The shifting ethnic, national, and racial affiliations created heterogeneous spaces where performance of attributes considered black could be a strong signifier of racial identity. New York City *rumberos* performed negotiations of national, ethnic, and racial identities created complex, changing ideas of what black and African diaspora identity was.

Just like strategic racial essentialism, the performance of identity has political and economic implications for people of African descent. Gordon and Anderson (1999) asserted that subjects in African descended communities strategically create, inform, ascribe, affirm and deny racial categories. These two scholars repudiate the belief that African diaspora identities are homogeneous, hybrid successors of an African original. Instead of only situating their identities relationally to "real" or "mythic" African

cultures, Gordon and Anderson claim that African diaspora communities also position their identities in relationship to other diaspora communities.

In Gordon's ethnographic study (1998), he describes how the Garifuna of Nicaragua constructs their identities based partly on their political or economic needs. Using Gilroy's *roots* and *routes* model that analyzes identity formation in terms of hybridity, Gordon charts how the Garifuna defined their ancestral connection to Africa through biological *roots.* They used a *routes* conceptualization of their identities by connecting and defining their freedom struggles to the African-American Civil Rights Movement. Juxtaposed with their African and African-American performances of identity, the Garifuna asserted their Indigenous ancestry as a way to gain land rights.

Rumberos described themselves by reference to their national origins, ethnicities, racial categories, hometowns, boroughs, or even religious affiliations. The creolized, fluid, contextual performances of identity are a defining factor of self-presentation in rumba spaces.

Mercer's focus on diaspora, as a noun, describes several different fragmented diasporas from an initial one (1994, 30). In this sense, African diasporic racial identities are constantly shifting entity because the political environments of participants of the diaspora are constantly changing. Mercer's work emphasizes the diaspora as a political entity that disrupts racialized, "incomplete histories" of the African diaspora. Rather than merely "performed" or afflicted with the negative aspects of *double-consciousness,* Mercer uncovers the durability of African diaspora identities.

The ability for African diaspora communities to cope with unpredictable, often violent political and economic environments speaks to the malleability of African diaspora identities. The flexibility of African diaspora identities allowed for them to flourish in environments where their survival was tied to the economic gain of the slave owning class, or sometimes inconsequential (Vargas 2007). The performance of adaptable identities has been an effective tool for survival for people of the African diaspora. Mercer's work relates to St. Clair Drake (1982), who saw the African diaspora as a political entity that disrupts "mis-education" of people of African descent. Mercer's work helps me understand multiple ways of using identity to ease the reality of living in societies where class, race, skin color, and gender place interlocutors at a socio-economic disadvantage in New York City and Havana.

THEORIZING PERFORMANCE IN RELATION TO THE AFRICAN DIASPORA, RACE, AND GENDER

Performance theory is fundamental to Afro-Latinidad theory. It is useful in theorizing the political, economic, and racial implications of performances of the rumba. "Performance" resides in the culture and action of people and communities (Bauman 1986). The "stage" in the rumba is located in multiple locations. There is the artistic stage where drummers and dancers assemble horizontally facing spectators. Additionally, the virtuosity of the performers captivates audiences with deceptively simple movements.

Performances of authenticity outside of music and dance are significant in the culture of *rumberos*. Performance on the stage or "performances of the everyday," demonstrate socially constructed viewpoints of authenticity in the field sites of this study.

It proved difficult to devise phenotypic categories to differentiate the multi-heritage, multi-national, diverse colorations of *rumberos,* even though many Cubans would classify most Havana rumberos as *negro* or *mulatto*. The New York City community was more ethnically and phenotypically heterogeneous. Viewpoints of who was black or "Afro" (insert nationality after "Afro") differed based on the observer, location, time, and space.

Jackson (2001) describes the phenomena of the continual performances of recognition and presentation). John L. Jackson's *Real Black* (2005) describes how inner-city African-American males perform a working class ethic as a "performance of blackness." Socially constructed signifiers of race, such as skin color, does not always mean the performer is "racially authentic." Jackson cites racial/classed performances are about the "doing." Similarly, rumba is about the *doing* of dance, music making, dancing, consumption of refreshments, and being present in the space of the rumba.

There is the virtual space that has a different type of presence. The performance is also different. Jackson references the action of "doing" because different spaces require different performances. Performances of race, class, and authenticity are hard to manage because context changes how "audiences" recognize performances (Jackson 2001). Racial performances are difficult to discern because they are a continual negotiation between the performer and audiences that define the "authentic." Researching

performances on and off the stage is useful in positioning multiple viewpoints into conversation. Identities as fluid constructs illustrate how malleable the transnational communities of *rumberos* are.

Jackson's work is especially useful as racial beliefs changed throughout the *rumba nueva* in New York City and Havana. Jackson's (2001) ethnography describes racial performances that are an observable, practice, or social performance that conveys the status of a "native." The rumba is an artistic form historically performed by a socio-cultural group (Afro-Cubans), certain classes (lower-working class) (Daniel ibid, 17), and articulated as a "black dance" by many Cubans during the time frame of this research (Isabel Estevez, personal interview 2010). The rumba is marked by the black and brown bodies who perform it even as the Castro government celebrates rumba as a uniquely Cuban art form (Daniel ibid). Performed by people that are considered black in Cuba, performances of blackness are intimately connected to performances of the rumba.

Participant Observation as a Primary Research Method

I was able to witness performances on and off the "stage" through participant observation in performance spaces as well as familial settings. Anthropologist Jafari Allen's (2011) usage of Clifford Geertz's "deep hanging out" (2001) utilizes Cuban everyday performances as a methodological tool to personal relationships with his interlocutors. Extended participant observation in performances and familial settings gave me the opportunity to experience the energy *rumberos* used in explaining their cultural

practices. Analyses of what the rumberos said in these spaces were no less important than the stylish moves they displayed on the dance floor.

Through "deep hanging out," I witnessed performances that gave different points of view. I remember a cold, rainy Friday evening at El Fogon in the winter of 2011. Simple questions could shift Pupy into long monologues about the meanings of the rumba. One of his long-time students asked him if mixing rumba with other styles was appropriate. Pupy gave a sly gaze at the sparse to see who would be able to hear his gravelly voice. There was just myself, another one of his students, and a few people at the bar. He explained that by definition, the rumba was already mixed. Sitting down, he showed some movements of flamenco. While he performed the movements, he continued to look around to see who was listening to him.

He continued with his narrative, focusing on us as he spoke. As he moved, he spoke slower, with a more meditative voice. We were able to see a side of Pupy that seemed more vulnerable than the man we were accustomed to. Sometimes less a conversation and more of a monologue, I could not do much except give outward signs that I was paying attention. This brief narrative explains how reviewing performances on the stage and semi-private conversations provided a more holistic view of different viewpoints in the rumba.

Deep hanging out was one of the main tools I used to learn how the rumba was much more than an artistic performance. It helped me strengthen the concept of Afro-Latinidad theory by positing it closely with the lived experiences of *rumberos* when they were not creating art. Sometimes I used electronic devices in the space. Familial places of rumba

creation were relaxed spaces where large displays of *rumbero* boasting took a respite. Most *rumberos* were articulate experts that could explain their role in local and transnational rumba communities. Learning the depth of *rumberos* was a tactic that proved useful during the tenure of this project.

There were other spaces outside of artistic performance that provided the opportunity to learn *rumberos*' viewpoints on diaspora, race, access, and Internet connectivity in the *rumba nueva.* At the Central Park rumbas, which have gone on continuously for over 30 years, whole families came to partake in the festivities. The rumba drummers sit on two or three benches facing a lake. The thin dusty walkway becomes a gauntlet for pedestrians trying to get to one of the park's exits. Most of the people sat in chairs and blankets on the tree covered hill that gives a view of the rumba drummers and dancers below. More than just music, people came to enjoy a shared, communal space. *Rumberos*, their family members, friends, and people who liked the music mingled in the hill area. Intentional *hanging out* was an excellent way to learn about the socio-cultural structure in the rumba.

THEORIZING STAGED PERFORMANCES

Afro-Latinidad theory provides the analytic tools to present the tension between embodied performance, artistic performance and mediated performances viewed on Internet social media. I personally enjoyed dancing in rumbas more than monitoring the Rumba in NYC Facebook comment wall. In time, I began to enjoy both as I came to understand that they were not mutually exclusive.

Dance theory helped me assess the ability of movement to transmit racial and gender information through gesture, symbolism, embodiment, and narrative (Daniel 1995; Fernandes 2006; Hamera 2007; Royce 1977; Turner 1986). These theorists provided a foundational understanding of dance from a cultural standpoint. Related specifically to this project, the work of Anita Gonzalez (2010) and Tommy DeFrantz (2002) provided a critical perspective into diaspora formation as it is performed at the local and international levels. Their work helped me theorize how the African diaspora is performed and the political implications of these performances.

The virtuosic dance of *rumberos* is what initially drew me to study the rumba. The vibrancy of the dance is how its seemingly simple movements can tell narratives within the confines of improvised drumming. The Merriam-Webster Online dictionary defines dance as "a series of rhythmic and patterned bodily movements usually performed to music" (accessed 4/22/10). Are moving foot stomps considered music? Is spirit possession a dance or a ritual? Is dance always rhythmic or patterned? These questions are at the heart of Dance Studies.

Dance scholars (Royce 1977; Gottschild 1996; Hamera 2007) reveal that dance is a culturally specific term. I combine these scholars' concepts and define dance as an inter-textual, embodied, and symbolic facet of culture. From there, I use dance to theorize racial, national, and gendered performances in the rumba.

Dance anthropology literature provided a unique viewpoint of performance and identity formation that other bodies of work do not. Literature in this field seeks to understand how dance is a symbolic facet of culture (Daniel 1995; Chasteen 2004;

Hamera 2007; Royce 1977). African diaspora scholars that focus on dance argue that dance can reify or dismantle racial constructs (Gottschilds 1996, 2005). This helps me address my research question of how Afro-Cubans construct and interpret their identities through live or recorded dance performances.

Barbara Browning's *Samba in Motion* (1995) describes cultural change through embodied movement. Browning analyzes Afro-Brazilian *capoeira*, a system of deception, dance, storytelling, and self-defense. Portuguese slave owners believed they were watching a sometimes comical dance. Browning's work describes how diaspora communities create artistic performances to cope with their geo-political environments. This project contributes to the anthropology of dance as *rumberos* in New York and Havana utilized rumba to comment on the distinctive nature of their environments. More than just entertainment, *rumberos* employed song and dance to create narratives of their gendered, racial, and socio-economic perspectives.

I combine these scholars' concepts and define dance as an inter-textual, embodied, and symbolic facet of culture. Royce says Western thought places a strong dichotomy between physical movement and rhythmic motion (1977). Many cultures do not have a concept of dance comparable to this Western notion. Agreeing with Royce, I define dance in a plural sense. By centering dance as a lens to analyze culture, we learn about facets of culture that are difficult to document through writing or are purposefully expunged from written histories.

The ways that people dance reveals how they perceive their bodies in relation to the world. Rumba bodies move in consciously sexual poses and erotic gestures. Sexuality

related to race, gender and class takes place on and off the performance stage. Thus, my working definition of dance attends to the various cultural definitions and performance of this art form. I am interested in the ways dance displays cultural symbols and cultural change.

Dance reveals the dynamics of representation and specific spaces. Gottschild's account of cultural hybridity, the racialized body, and representation helps me contextualize how the rumba rose to prominence – first in the estimation of the Cuban state and then internationally. Gottschild (1996) argues that the "black dancing body" has historically been about white audience desirability of the displayed black body. She relates this to the idea of the physical ownership of the black body through slavery. Gottschild contends that interrogation of dance concurrently reviews racial physical constructs. Using the example of the Irish jig, Gottschild describes this dance displayed class, race, and nation simultaneously. Performed in raucous, multi-ethnic and multi-racial dance halls, the early Irish jig displayed an immigrant and working class ethic. The dance movement's names, aesthetic, and blur between audiences and performers challenged middle class Victorian theater. The later insisted that audiences perform a type of respectability that required audience silence and Western European gentility.

Dance is a powerful way to transmit ideas about race and belonging. I incorporate this theory to as I heard audiences and practitioners continually talk about dancing bodies in racial terms. Lipsitz (1998) and Gottschild's (1996) method of charting changing views of race was helpful as I sought to chart different racial attitudes in different field sites. Their examples of Irish racialization provide a solid basis that is transferrable to my

multi-ethnic field sites. In 18th and 19th centuries saw a plethora of negative propaganda showing the *otherness* of the Irish. Many of the early representations of the Irish immigrants and Irish Americans included caricatured pictures of Irish people as apes, perpetually drunk, a fondness for dancing the Irish jig, and sexually promiscuous. Understanding representation of the body was helpful when I did online ethnographies on *Rumba in Face.*

Finally, dance's relationship to cultural change and cultural hybridity is an important theoretical tool that was necessary to my theorization of Afro-Latinidad theory. Chasteen says European dances introduced the "closed position" in Latin American dances. The closed position is an embrace with the lead's hand on the follow's shoulder blades and the follow's hand on the lead's shoulder. Enslaved Africans brought body isolations, improvisation, and extensive hip movements to European descendent dances. Popular dances of Latin America reveals how colonial officials prohibited many dances that brought different races in close physical contact. In 19th century Cuba, *son,* the pre-cursor to salsa, was scandalized in white Cuban elite media sources (Moore 1997). Critics called it a "degenerate" dance that damaged the morals of privileged young (white) women (ibid). Rumba, which the Revolutionary government claimed as a representation of the Cuban State, was originally castigated by influential white Cubans because it mixed Spanish style singing with secular African dances (Daniel 1995). Scholars look at historic documents, reenactments, contemporary representations, and dance repertoires to determine how cultures mix. They have developed sophisticated explanations of culture

by learning the dynamics of cultural change. I continually refer back to scholarship that blurs the lines between artistic and everyday performances in this project.

By using performance ethnography, I was able to focus on the difficult task of recording how individuals and groups perform their identities. This mode of inquiry attempts to document linguistic patterns, gesture, affect, and information gained through the body. Conquergood (1985, 1989) and Joni Jones (1996, 2002) use performance ethnography, in differing ways, to understand, evaluate, critique, and display acquired bodily behaviors that demonstrate specific cultural knowledge. These scholars generally seek to use a collaborative method throughout the research process.

Performance theorist Joni Jones believes that culture is series of acquired behaviors with political, social, and material ramifications (1996). Jones claims that what some nationalist claim are essential racial characteristics is actually acquired behavior (2002). Jones believes that scholars can enact these acquired behaviors and learn about respondents' non-verbal communicative culture. This was especially useful since art making was only one element of the rumbas.

Conquergood writes that performance ethnography can bring diverse ideas together in "dialogic performances." Conquergood states, "This performative stance struggles to bring together different voices, world views, value systems, and beliefs so they can communicate with one another" (1985, 9). The aim of dialogic performances is to bring self and other together so that they can question, debate, and challenge one another. Conquergood hopes to learn about the *other* through voices from the center as well as those on the margins. According to Conquergood, dialogic performances can only happen

when ethnographers learns the language, movement, and storytelling of their respondents. Conquergood advocates that ethnographers practice these performances for their respondent community's evaluation. These performances resist "academic performances" that makes the research inaccessible to people untrained in academic language.

Norman Denzin (2003) believes that dialogic performances build lasting relationships with community members. Denzin says that dialogic performances create "interpretive sufficiency" (consciousness rising), "representational adequacy" (freedom from various stereotypes), and "authentic adequacy" (promotion of multiple voices). Denzin believes that scholars should strive to refine their epistemologies through dialogic performances (Ibid).

Authentic representation is fundamental to performance ethnography theory. Denzin calls for a "grounded aesthetics" by turning negative representations of race, gender, and class into positive ones. By using the power of the academic voice, Denzin wants ethnographers to create political cultural images that rally subaltern peoples.

In *Critical Ethnography,* D. Soyini Madison (2005) argues that interpretation is the key to providing a moral center for anthropologists. I needed to be clear about my moral center as I spent days with some men who had been emotionally hardened by the economic scarcity of the Special Period. I did make friendships with skilled *rumberos* who targeted "naïve" foreigners. A few of these men thought nothing of feigning romantic interest in the possibility of receiving an immigration visa through marriage with a foreigner.

Madison asks researchers to recognize, critique, and analyze their own positions, analysis, and epistemologies. I had an uneasiness about the uneven power dynamics and sex economy that sometimes occurred in rumba spaces. Madison uses powerful statements like "challenging regimes of truth" and "unveiling power" to describe that scholars are not blank slates that record objective reality. Since most scholars place their accountability to academic standards, Madison advocates scholars collaborate with respondents in the questions they ask to incorporate different viewpoints. Madison's mediations on ethics and responsibility provide a moral center to Afro-Latinidad theory that accounts for the belief systems of respondents in Havana, New York City, and *Rumba in NYC*.

PERFORMANCE TO PRACTICE: TOWARDS AN EMBODIED METHODOLOGY OF DANCE

Anthropologists Katherine Dunham and Pearl Primus pioneered performance-ethnography practice that centered the body as a site of knowledge. Their work provides a deep, ethnographically informed analysis of representation of the black body. I strategically insert their scholarship in Afro-Latinidad theory because their well-researched work demonstrates how embodied participant observation and participant performance is an effective way to collect and analyze data.

As a methodological tool, Dunham and Primus's theoretical framework operates from the understanding that the body is a complicated, living, embodied text that can store, internalize, and disseminate information (Clark 2005; Green 2002). While in the field, I entered rumba circles so I could draw an understanding of how it feels to be present in

the space of rumba creation. The body as a research device, in locations where the art form is nourished, is preferable to distanced, de-contextualized “arm-chair” research.

Dunham and Primus’ personal, ethnographically informed work provides further evidence of the relationships between racial performance and representation. This project expands on their anthropologically informed work by looking at the connections between racial performances and media presentation via Internet social media. I am interested in the questions that arise such as the implications of tropes of the hyper-sexualized black male and the sexually available *mulatta* in relationship to African diaspora identities in the rumba.

Pearl Primus's Strange Fruit

Pearl Primus, an influential dance anthropologist, wanted to dispel common mid 20th century beliefs that Africa was a land without history (Green 2002). Primus argued that the African dancing body could “speak” a language that de-centered Eurocentric belief systems. Primus believed that the *moving body* could bypass centuries of internalized racism and speak to the collective humanity of all people (Green 2002). In 1945, Primus created Strange Fruit, an interpretive dance about lynching in the United States. Primus’ performance demonstrated that African aesthetic sensibilities could mix with Euro-American aesthetics to tell a unique story. Primus provided the reasoning that I use to argue the theoretical and ethnographic centrality of dance analysis as a methodological too to understand race.

Pearl Primus mixed African and American modern dance movements to tell unique stories of her time. Her implementation of African and modern dance techniques reminds me of W.E.B. Dubois concept of "double consciousness." Dubois (1973) wrote that African-Americans have to reconcile their American sides with their "negro" sides. I viewed Primus' Strange Fruit as a bodily reconciliation of these two sides by using a Euro-American dance style to explain the distinctiveness of the African-American experience in the United States (Anon 2008).

Primus showed the visceral tensions of double-consciousness by her lineal, African-infused modern dance combinations followed by violent falls to the ground. After the dancer would fall, she would run up to an imagined object, which I interpret as a lynched, hanging body.

Primus's choreographies provide alternative theorizations of race and the body. In the reproduction of Primus' Strange Fruit (Anon 2008), the dancer's tense body and grimacing face showed the restrictive nature that race has on African-American identities. Her repetitive falling to the ground can signify the inability of these two belief systems to unite. Primus' performance exhibits how 16th century Western European explorers and subsequent scholars produced "Africa" and "negro" as antithesis of "Europe" and "whiteness" (Asante 1994).

Primus' bodily interpretation of disjuncture shows that the African-American body can reconcile itself through the deconstruction, and in my opinion, destruction, of historic notions of Africa, Europe, whiteness, and blackness that various communities circulate and bestow meaning. Primus's embodied knowledge production through hip gyrations,

bare torsos and poly-rhythmic syncopation, and Afro-modern dance hybrid provided an archive of knowledge that challenged the Eurocentric belief that the looseness of African dance was incompatible with the restrained technique of Euro-American modern dance. I include this narrative to show how seemingly simple dance movements can present complex ideas of the body and race. I use this same attention to detail when I analyzed the sexualized, gendered, abstracted bodies of *rumberos* moving in space.

Katherine Dunham's Dancing Body

Katherine Dunham's "research to performance" epistemology provides justification that performance can act as an avenue to understand the other as well as raise theoretic questions on race and gender (Hodson 2005). Dunham believed in an African diaspora body that embodied memories of an African past. This "bodily text" contained information of an African past, but was a body on a cultural continuum. She believed African diaspora communities memorialize and historicize particular events while they consciously expunge other memories from the community consciousness.

Dunham (2005a, 2005b) argued that the dancing body could bring harmony to both the individual and the collective social body. She believed this same body could bring what Jacqui Alexander later termed "psychic autonomy". She understood that the body could bring audiences to new places and new understandings.

In her 1963 production of Aïda, Dunham used a black performer as the Ethiopian princess. The Egyptian army was composed of Somalians, Nubians, which "archaeology identifies as the population of Black Africa at the time of ancient Egypt" (Alexander

2005, 500). This challenged the rising belief that ancient Western and Southern European immigrants civilized Egypt (Ibid). Dunham used the body to negate a singular Euro-centric history of Egypt and the Levant. Dunham used black bodies to provide an alternative of history that developed new lines of inquiry for artists and scholars studying Africa and the African diaspora at the time. Her scholarship helps me theorize the socio-cultural implications of artistic performances in distinct rumba spaces in Havana, New York City, and social media groups.

MIGRATION THEORY IN RELATION TO THE VIRTUAL AFRICAN DIASPORA

I argue that the economic changes that affect audiences, practices, and community profoundly altered racial identity in Havana and New York City. There is an uneven distribution of wealth and resources in globalization. Likewise, the distribution of power is asymmetric. My usage of migration theory understands physical and virtual migration as complimentary processes. Immigration and migration only became a high priority in anthropology in the 1950s and 1960s (Horevitz 2009, 747). Anthropologists started to understand that immigration was a part of the identities of participants in the communities they studied (Horevitz ibid).

There is a distinction between "migration" and "immigration" (Foner 2003; Horevitz 2009). Migration implies a person that may move back and forth between one or more "host communities" (Horevitz ibid, 748). "Transnational immigration" is defined as an immigrant community that maintains ties with their home country. My case study of

the transnational communities facilitated by communication technology looks at how people are still able to move despite economic, physical, and political obstacles.

A variety of immigration frameworks have emerged since the 1960s and 1970s (Horevitz 2009, 747). Horevitz describes "old immigration" of the past defined as from 1890s to the 1910s (ibid 749). This is the immigration that most people associate with European immigrants entering the United States through Ellis Island. Horevitz describes this type of "new Immigration" had a rise in trade agreements between the United States and the Global South (Ibid, 749). Horevitz describes this immigration as follows:

> One group consists of highly educated immigrants-migrants (mostly from Asia or Western Europe) who may hold doctorate degrees, and who tend to insert themselves into the tech industry. The second group consists of large numbers of poor immigrants-migrants from third world countries, in particular Latin America, with low levels of education that end up in low-paying jobs that often lack insurance and basic safeties (Horevitz Ibid, 749).

Understanding the economic reasons for immigration provides the needed analysis to understand immigration of Cubans to New York. Moreover, low-levels of formal education do not mean that embodied knowledge, or sensory education is absent. There are other ways that people learn and transmit knowledge.

TRANSNATIONAL THEORY

Transnational theory is the most important migration theoretical framework to this study. This theory is useful because it describes immigration as "transcending borders"

(Horevitz Ibid, 753). The United States Embargo is a concrete embodiment to Cuban migration. The fees incurred for moving between nations hinders free movement from two countries so near. This theory is beneficial because it looks at more than politico-economic processes in the immigrant process (Horevitz Ibid, 753). National borders impeded by national laws have trouble keeping up with laws that obstruct the physical movement of people. Additionally:

> In the twentieth century, migrant labor also flows in the same direction, while investment capital flows contrary to it. This most recent trend in macro-developmental theory represents the farthest departure from the neoclassical, push-pull model of migration (Kearney 1994, 340).

Migration literature helps me assess the particularities of Afro-Cuban migrations and identity formation. Scholars of post-1965 immigration have introduced a transnational frame of analyses that highlights social ties linking societies of origin and settlement (Eckerstein and Barberia 2002; Levitt 2001; Pessar 1999). These scholars observe how continued home country ties leads immigrants to resist full assimilation. Transnationalists emphasize the continued ties that children of immigrants have with their parents' country of origin, and how these relationships limit full assimilation (Aguirre 1976; Gans 1974; Rieff 1993). This work bridges these two theories by showing how rumba dancers assimilate to New York's multi-ethnic environment while maintaining (to varying degrees) contact with family and artistic colleagues in Cuba. This project complicates diaspora migration theories by assessing how virtual contact through electronic devices affects transnational ties.

CONCLUSION

This chapter described the anthropologically informed interdisciplinary framework of Afro-Latinidad theory. Critical implementation of African Diaspora and Performance theories provide a useful way to investigate the multiple ways transnational groups of *rumberos* identify themselves.

Afro-Latinidad theory contributes to race theory by assessing the fluid ways artistic expressive culture, space, and Internet social media complicate racial performances. One of the main contributions of this work is a critical analytic framework that provides spaces for the merger of theory and practice. Specifically, how the performance of dance and music can work as a methodological tool to understand socio-cultural implications of performance. Merging theory and practice addresses the complicated, intersectional identities of my interlocutors in New York City, Havana, and the virtual group. With my theory framework clearly presented, I move to ethnographic narratives and vignettes to respond to the thesis and main research questions.

Chapter 3 The Embodied History of the Rumba and the *Rumba Nueva*

This chapter addresses historic and social forces that shaped the rumba in New York City and Havana. In it, I describe key events that occurred during this dissertation's research time period from 1991 to late 2012. Additionally, this chapter investigates how transnational communication influenced the rumba in three main locations: Havana, New York City, and the Rumba in NYC Facebook group.

The time frame of the *rumba nueva* extends from Cuba's Special Period to the passing of a veteran performer in 2012. During this period, the New York performances were affected by the gentrification of New York City neighborhoods, fluctuating immigration laws, aggressive policing of minority neighborhoods and interpretations of city ordinances that criminalized rumba parties in Central Park. To describe the socio-cultural differences of the *rumba nueva* and the preceding period, I continually return to the core thesis of this project, which addresses transnational communication through physical travel and social media, staged versus informal rumbas, ethnic diversity, and government involvement that affected the performances of race, identity, and nation in the rumba.

The Rumba and Group Formation through the Rumba Complex

From overcrowded *solares* (barracks) in 19th century Havana to crowded Spanish Harlem tenements, rumba has been a means of communication for those who know its syntax of gesture, rhythm, and language. The Cuban rumba is a secular art form that has rhythmic gestures that relates to spiritual practices (Daniel 1995, 16). Rumba provides a theatrical pallet of movement, drumming, and song that is a joyous expression of movement (Daniel 1995, 16). Hands, shoulders, feet, and head move in syncopated polyrhythm against the beat (Daniel 1995, 14). The rumba is an expression of communities historically marked as "other." My relationships with *rumberos* provided critiques and contemporary explanations to crucial yet dated texts on rumba (Boggs 1992; Daniel 1995; Fernandes 2006).

Improvisation constitutes the lifeblood of the rumba. Improvisational song lyrics, rhythm, and dance are generated by available objects. A wooden drawer, legs taken from a chair, two metal spoons, or a plastic bottle can add the percussive sound unique to the rumba. In reality, the rumba is a communal effort. It is art-making that coalesces into a collective voice that facilitates familial relationships among people who might have been strangers just minutes before. Group cohesiveness, facilitated through music, has been a notable legacy of rumbas in the past and continues to be a primary goal of *rumberos* from Cuba to the boroughs of New York City.

The proliferation of discourses on the familial relationships created by the rumba increased during the final years of the *rumba nueva*. The rumba has recently been formerly recognized by the Cuban state; in an official ceremony held at the Unión

Nacional de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba (UNEAC) in Havana on February 12, 2012, the rumba was declared a "*patrimonio cultural de la nación*" (cultural heritage of the nation). Additionally, the rumba has been included in discussions of Afro-Latino identity, such as those at the "Afro-Latin@s Now! Strategies for Visibility and Action" conference held at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York in November 2011.

From the beginning, rumba was a *creole* (mixed racial heritage) invention created in Havana by working class Cubans, mostly of color during the 1880s. Peñalosa (2011, xiii) provides a straightforward definition:

> By most accounts, rumba first emerged in Cuba during the 1880s, at the time when slavery was finally abolished on the island. We know that the Congolese-based progenitors of rumba existed in the slave *barracones* (barracks) during the early nineteenth century. It is therefore highly probable that various types of proto-rumbas were danced prior to the first rumba references made by contemporary chroniclers. Initially the musical instruments of rumba consisted of regular household items: the side of a cabinet functioned in the role of the present-day *tumba* or *salidor* (the primary supportive drum), while an overturned drawer served as the *quinto* (the lead drum) and a pair of spoons played the *cáscara* section on whatever was available.

I accessed a scholarly archive of research on the Cuban rumba in addition to the interviews I conducted. In New York City, The younger generation's (those under 30) knowledge consisted mostly of knowledge of Los Muñequitos de Matanzas, Yoruba Andabo, members from the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional de Cuba, Raices Habaneras,

and Raices Profundas. Since much of the rumba's history is oral, there are multiple histories, legends, and myths that differ from one another (Peñalosa 2011).

Arguments that the rumba includes cultural retentions from Africa are supported by aesthetics and even its name. According to Ortiz (1998), the *(ma)-dumba* was first found in Haiti, and gave its name to *tumba*, also found in the East of Cuba, and out of *tumba*, came the word rumba (Peñalosa 2011). Within the rumba instrumental ensemble, the largest drum with the lowest pitch is called the *tumbadora*, likely derived from the *tumba* or *ditumba* drum of Central Africa. Both words are from the Kikongo and Kiluba languages.

Other suggestive evidence for rumba's African roots is grounded in oral history encapsulated by the music. Cuban musician David Oquendo commented on the Congo/Angola influences of Cuban music in Heddy Honigmann's 2004 documentary, *Dame la Mano.* According to Fernando Ortiz, the word *yambú* was used in Gabon and meant a specific dance in Kikongo (Ortiz 1998). Sublette's scholarship indicates relations to the Kikongo word, *dyambu* (word, opinion, thought, judgment) of which the plural form is *mambu* or *mambo* (Sublette 2007). In rumba there are many hidden references to important Congo words, such as *yumba*, which has the same meaning as *aché* in Santería (Sublette 2007).

In Spanish, the word rumba also denotes a collective festive event, a celebratory meal, or simply, or a party (Daniel 1995). In the Americas, the word is synonymous with Bantu and other West Central African words such as *timba*, *tumba*, *macumba*, and *tambo* which all mean secular, festive gatherings. In present day Africa, the word rumba may

denote several musical forms, but generally refers to a contemporary musical form created in central Africa (Daniel 1995).

THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RUMBA

Rumba's association with Afro-Cubans and poor white Cubans dates back to its creation in the 1880s. As a rhythm created in pre-emancipation Cuba, enslaved Cubans of African descent mixed West African syncopated rhythms with Spanish style singing. After the abolition of slavery in Cuba in 1886, Afro-Cubans living in rural areas moved to urban areas and joined poor white Cubans in search of jobs (Andrews 2004; Bronfman 2004; Daniel 1995; Helg 1995; Martinez 2007). Afro-Cubans and poor white Cubans created a musical style that displayed the joys, hardships, and triumphs of urban life. People gathered at rumba's affirmed hybridized African retentions in Cuba.

Cuban Rumba Versus Ballroom Rumba

There are two main genres of rumba: Cuban and International. When I explain my research to colleagues interested in cultural identity work, many ask if I have taken classes at one of the Arthur Murray ballroom dance studios around the country. In one instance, a renowned anthropologist that studies Indigenous food-ways in the Americas asked if I watched *Dancing with the Stars* to see how the rumba compares to other ballroom dance styles.

I responded that I perform the rumba to understand the intricate conversations people have via their bodies. I explained how extreme poverty affected the performance practices of Cubans. She responded that the explosion of international competitions held

in gilded ballrooms in capitals across the globe cost millions of dollars to produce. I then knew we were talking about two different dances. The glittered spandex, spray tan, and sharp hip-rolls popularized on television dance competitions were far from the earthiness of the Cuban rumba. I learned that describing the rumba was helpful since the international ballroom form was also popular with dance enthusiasts.

Stylistically, Cuban rumba and ballroom rumba are very different. While both styles display variations of traditional Cuban rumba rhythms such as the *clave*, the popular ballroom form is a closed positioned partner dance with the follow and lead standing face to face. The Cuban rumba can be *yambu* (with the man and woman facing each other), *guaguanco* (next to each other), or *columbia* style (solo). Traditional rumba dancing does not use open and close position partner holds. The body aesthetic of rumba dancers is a curved, bent body frame, extensive bodily syncopation that works in conversation with the drums, and dance is thoroughly connected with the style of rumba being played.

In contrast, the ballroom version has an upright frame, foot patterns that move within a box (American style), and the rhythms are not explicitly connected to the movement**.** While the ballroom rumba is usually danced to *bolero*, *son*, or American R&B music, the Cuban rumba is an interconnected complex of music, dance, and songs. The intricacy of the rumba complex is one of the reasons why the rumba is such a complete way of being. As hardcore *rumberos* say, *"la rumba es mi vida"* (rumba is my life).

THE RUMBA COMPLEX: A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF THE RUMBA PERFORMANCE

The rumba consists of three components: sound/percussion, dance/movement, and voice/song (Jottar 2009). Describing the rumba as a complex is a good starting point to describe the rumba as a multifaceted performance practice. I entered the rumba looking to learn its intricate choreographies that used theatrical styling from religious practices of secret societies of the *abakuá,* Afro-Cuban religious traditions*,* and even Cuban social dances. I came to learn that the dance is only one element. Skilled *rumberos* may be strong in one or two areas, but most experts are able to dance, sing, and play drums[8].

The sound of the rumba is an unmistakable, intense percussive conversation. Staged rumba sessions usually have at least three drums: *salidor*, *segunda*, and *quinto*. Two hardened wood sticks called claves, give the foundational rhythm that helps musicians keep rhythmic time. Large community rumbas can use different elements other than drums. The body or any hard surface can be an equally important percussive instrument that creates the sounds of the rumba.

Sitting in numerous rumba practice sessions when I was in Havana, I watched the members of Rumberos de Cuba clap specific rhythms for the drummers to mimic. The percussive capabilities of the body, a wooden drawer, the legs of a chair, a tiled floor, or a glass bottle can add to the interlocked percussive sounds of the rumba. An important

8 I use the term "sing" loosely. Pupy had a raspy, gravely singing voice that lingered in the air. Most rumberos were not great singers by US or even Cuban standards, but their voices conveyed the emotion necessary to tell vibrant stories. Just as importantly, good rumba singers could enunciate loud enough so others could hear and join the chorus sections of the songs.

point to make is that the rumba can use instruments specifically made for music or improvised instruments that can make percussive sounds.

Without knowledge of the rumba complex, listeners might believe that the rumba is only a festive gathering of people that sometimes make unintelligible chants that many native Spanish speakers cannot even understand. Along with the rumba complex, the rumba is about space. For the New York City community, El Fogon in the Bronx was some people's first experience of the rumba. The two Afro-Panamanian owners that owned the apartment complex above El Fogon placed antique couches, abstract paintings by local artists, and a coffee table on the perimeter of the one-room venue. There were metal Victorian stands where guests could put their drinks while they watched the rumba. They had their Peruvian maintenance man create an elevated wooden stage that gave the space a retro, classic feel.

Songs reverberated within designated spaces of the rumba. Early on Friday evenings before the rumbas started at El Fogon, I had the chance to sit down and listen to the semi-improvisational lyrics that Pupy belted in his characteristically screechy voice. He had an immense repertoire of songs about city living, country life, great *rumberos* of the past, Cuban historical figures, political reform after the Revolution, and of course, romance. I heard classic songs like "*al soñar que era feliz*" (to dream that I was happy) performed by Tata Güines on the *Todos Estrellas de la Rumba: Rapsodia Rumbera* album released by the label, Egrem in 2000. I can remember hearing many renditions of the popular "*Oye Paula*."

There are songs that reference *palo* and *Santería* religious traditions like the "*Mayeya*" on the previously mentioned *Raposida Rumbera* album. In the song, Juan de Dios, the creator of the folkloric ensemble Raices Profundas and Gregorio *"*El Goyo*"* Hernández gives a lesson on how spiritual practices are integral in the lives of many *rumberos*. The song paints a vivid description of what it means to "walk the path" of the *orishas*. The song's lyrics about the daily rituals of religious adherents illustrate the union of sacred and secular in the rumba community.

International popularity has not changed the rumba's power to tell stories that relate to the lives of African diaspora populations. Overt political songs against the Cuban government were rare in Havana and New York City. Nevertheless, the rich palate of drumming, dancing, and singing provides a canvass for rich narratives.

THE POWER TO STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY

The rumba brings a strong communal feeling by performance practices that request group participation. The continual repetition of words can lead to what Turner described as *communitas* (Turner 1982). Turner theorized *communitas* as a process of transformation for the individual as well as the group. Additionally, Turner described *communitas* as the "liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc., from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses" (Turner 1982, 44).

In Havana, the university educated civil servant, brick layer, and white hotel clerk could all be *rumberos* for that moment. The education, access to convertible pesos,

political rhetoric, and contrasting views on the current benefits of the Revolution were temporarily suspended. For those brief moments, when the chorus reached a united pitch, slightly tipsy with Havana Club rum, social and economic barriers momentarily disappeared. They all became *rumberos*. The attributes associated with the "backwardness" of some Black Cubans (speech, rural-ness, religion, and sexuality), became the same attributes that connected the different color, racial, educational, professional, and economic differences among *rumberos*.

SIGNIFICANT TIME PERIODS IN THE RUMBA

Political and cultural mobilization of enslaved Africans and Cubans of African descent dates to their arrival in the Americas (Andrews 2004; Chasteen 2004; Daniel 1995, 2005; Gomez 2005; Klein 1971; Martinez 2007; Sarduy, Perez and Stubbs 1993). Founded in Havana on August 7, 1908, the Partido Indepediente de Color was the "hemisphere's first independent black political party" (Godfried 2000). Cuban state newspapers regarded the group as a divisive, racist entity because it organized to fight for the rights of Cubans of African descent. Disturbing to the ruling Cuban elite, the Partido initially used legal means to fight for the equality Cubans of African descent. Government backed newspapers dismissed the Partido as a racist organization that acted contrary to the supposedly colorblind Cuban State (Bronfman 2004).

In the Little War of 1912, government forces destroyed the organization and killed between 2,000 to 6,000 blacks and mulattos (Helg 1995, 225). The consequences for overt political parties based on racial solidarity proved to be ostracization, persecution

or death. I argue that Afro-Cuban religious and secular cultural practices filled the political void because these were some of the few places Cubans of African descent could congregate. And even those spaces were policed and periodically outlawed (Chasteen 2004; Helg ibid; Jottar 2011; Sublette 2007).

THE AFRO-CUBANISMO PERIOD OF THE 1920S

The popularization and commercialization of forms of music that were created or performed heavily by people of African descent that later became nationalized "Cuban" popular forms (Moore 1997, Sublette 2007). The 1920s Afro-Cubanismo artistic movement was when Afro-Cuban music was melded or "softened" for middle-class white audiences (Moore 1997). As Afro-Cuban art forms became national art forms, Spanish and African descended artistic expressions were celebrated as uniquely Cuban creations. Tourists from the United States looking for a Caribbean getaway enjoyed Cuban art forms that had strong roots in African descendant communities.

By the 1920s, the internationalization of salon rumba became evident. The rise of the Prohibition Era and the circulation of Havana *conjuntos* (groups) or *septetos* (orchestras composed of seven musicians) signaled a period of artistic transnational fertilization between Havana, New York City, and Paris. Havana's cabarets entertained patrons with traditional *conjuntos* performing *son* or *guaracha* music popularly categorized as *rhumba*. Their repertoire also included the arrangements of traditional rumba lyrics (for example, "*Maria de la O*"), sanitized rumba choreographies, and rumba

uniforms. The circulation of these *conjuntos* resulted in the so-called “rumba craze,” and the Afro-Cubanismo aesthetic movement (Moore 1997).

The Afro-Cubanismo is an important period related to this research because the international popularity of Afro-Cuban music altered how Cubans identified themselves and were identified by North Americans and Europeans. The music helped solidify the belief that Afro-Cuban culture was an essential part of Cuban culture (Moore 1997). The *Afro-Cubanismo* reified and also challenged stereotypes of black subjectivity. Even though the wording changed from “primitive” in the Afro-Cubanismo to “exotic” or “authentic” in the *rumba nueva*, a cursory Internet search in the 2010s would lead to a plethora of websites that advertised cultural trips that helped tourists “discover” Afro-Cuban culture in its “authentic” forms. It is not hard to argue that the *rumba nueva* might be called a new Afro-Cubanismo.

THE 1959 REVOLUTION

The years after the 1959 Revolution saw some of the biggest changes in governmental acceptance and promotion of the rumba. Rumba, which the Castro government claimed as a national dance of Cuba, was originally castigated by influential white Cubans because its strong African aesthetics and the unpredictability of the festivities (Daniel 1995). Between 1959 and 1962, the Revolutionary Government sought to enshrine its goals of egalitarianism and a classless society by incorporating previously marginalized activities by the lower classes and Afro-Cubans (Daniel 1995). Maligned

during the Batista regime, *rumberos* and rumba groups now received government sponsorship in the form of practice spaces, salaries, and opportunities to perform abroad.

THE COLLAPSE OF THE SOVIET UNION AND CUBA'S SPECIAL PERIOD

The robust network of Havana *rumberos* was in certain ways strengthened by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Individuals, communities, and families had to work together to survive the extreme lack of even the most basic food supplies.

The Special Period*,* which is short for the "Special Period in Time of Peace*",* was the period after the Soviet Union collapsed. Before this time, from 1961 to 1989, Cuba was part of the Soviet Union's Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) (Roland 2011, 113). The Soviet Union traded oil for Cuba's sugar at subsidized prices for the former. Roland argues that "this gave Cubans an artificially high standard of living based on Soviet imported goods disseminated through the central state system" (Roland 2011, 21). In some instances, households even had more items than they could use (Roland 2011, 21).

Living Memories of the Special Period

Interview conversations supported some of the archival work I found on daily practices during the Special Period. When I lived in the Vedado neighborhood with the Estevez family, next to the Conjuncto Folkloríco Nacional*'*s Gran Palenque, Isabel and her daughters made frequent apologies for the spices, cleaners, vegetables, and hygiene products they did not have. Not wanting them to feel embarrassed, I always responded,

"*la vida no es facil en Cuba"* (life is not easy in Cuba). Isabel talked about how life was easier after the Revolution but became harder as time passed.

Even though a recovery began in the late 1990s with the focus on tourism and closer economic relationships with Venezuela's Chávez, resource shortages still existed for regular Cubans (Hunt 2014). Isabel brought the economic realities of the Special Period to life. She remembered the rough dates of specific events that related to times she had to fight for items she needed. One example was the time a woman cut in front of her at a station that provided bread rations. Isabel jokingly said the crowd stopped her from dragging the woman out of line by the neck (Personal communication February 13, 2012). The stories she said of being 30 pounds thinner coincided with the dates of some of the harshest years of the Special Period.

The lessons of the Special Period and the continued hardships of Cubans continued to affect the *rumberos* I connected with in Havana. It was a history that my interlocutors said still affected them. Even in the relatively middle class Havana neighborhood of Vedado, the Estevez family's mop was a long stick with a rag on it. Even as late as 2012, *rumberos* who were young children in the 1990s said they still hoarded basic necessities they received from foreign visitors or relatives living abroad. When we talked about life during the Special Period, even the most gregarious *rumberos* nodded their heads, furled their eyebrows and moved their lips in a tight funnel shape when I asked questions about the Special Period. The Special Period still lived in the oral histories and visceral memories of hunger for some Cubans that lived through that time.

Leonel Jr., Isabel's son that I befriended in Austin, told his mother I wanted to study the rumba and "folkloric" dancing in Cuba. She was visibly taken back when I said I was more interested in how *rumberos* lived during the Special Period and into the present. Isabel was not used to a foreigner asking about the lifestyles of *rumberos.* Even if she personally thought *rumberos* often showed the worst aspects of Cuban culture, she was helpful in urging her ex-husband, Leonel Sr., to introduce me to some of the *rumberos* he knew. She frankly said her family desperately needed the 12 convertible pesos I paid for rumba and folkloric dance classes taught by Leonel Sr.

The tightening United States Embargo halted much of the bi-national touring of North American and Cuban artists. During the Special Period years, remittances became even more important (Aguirre 1976; Boswell 2008; Knauer 2009a, 2009b; Richardson 1989). Cuban interlocutors in Havana who viewed the rumba as a pastime began to see it as a possible way to make money working in the cultural tourism and tourist.

Even with the United States imposed embargo, the popularity of Afro-Cuban arts throughout the 20th century had created a global market for Afro-Cuban expressive culture (Moore 2012). "Rumba's appeal to foreign audiences is due largely to an increase in consumption and visibility of the music abroad since the late 1980s via not only musical recordings but also international tours in North America and Europe by big-name groups like Los Muñequitos de Matanzas, Afrocuba de Matanzas, Yoruba Andabo, and Clave y Guaguancó" (Bodenhemer ibid, 2010). Travels and movement by Cubans helped increase the popularity of the rumba during the *rumba nueva*. Bi-national communication between *rumberos* in Havana and New York fuels questions such as: who has the right to

perform rumba at cultural institutions, teach to non-Cuban students, travel abroad, receive Cuban government sponsorships, and collaborate with foreign musicians and dancers. The current (2010) recession in the United States and economic crisis in Cuba has intensified these discussions.

HISTORY OF THE RUMBA IN NEW YORK CITY

In the 1940s, record stores in Manhattan and the Bronx sold the latest Latin American and Caribbean recordings, including the "first known traditional Cuban rumba record" produced in New York City, *Ritmo Afro-Cubano Collection* (Jotar 2011). Live traditional rumbas in New York took place primarily within private homes, during social gatherings or after the Afro-Cuban religious ceremonies of *palo* and *regla de ocha*. These were the "elite rumbas" at the homes of musical heavy weights like Patato, Totíco, Mongo, Arsenio and Kike Rodríguez (Jottar 2011, 9).

The rumba in New York City, specifically in Central Park, was a predominantly Puerto Rican practice with Cubans and African Americas (Jottar 2011). Peter Manuel (1994) analyzes how Puerto Rican borrowings, synthesis, and creative appropriation of Cuban music resulted in its transformation and/or re-signification. For instance, the performance of rumba *guaguancó* became the dominant genre in New York City's drum circles, as well as the symbol of Puerto Rican, Nuyorican, and pan-Latino solidarity (Manuel 1994, 267).

Jottar (2011, 11) notes that rumbas in the 1960s and 1970s were primarily a Puerto Rican practice that articulated an "Afro-Boricua" or mixed racial identity. Along

with the Puerto Ricans, Jottar records that Félix Sanabria remarked that African-Americans had a major impact on Puerto Ricans by bringing their drums to the park (Jottar 2011, 11).

Even the jazz legend John Coltrane visited Central Park during the early formation of the rumba (Jottar 2011). By the late 1970s, Cuban rumba had become the official purpose for gathering (Jottar 2011). Similar to the rumba in Havana, music and socializing overlapped in the performance of traditional rumba in Central Park. Chatting, eating, and making new connections took place on the grassy hill where people from different areas of New York City created a community centered on the rumba. The community spirit continues in the present (as of February 2013). Children play while groups of adults share generic Coca-Cola sometimes mixed with hard liquor from pocket size bottles. Yucca, mango, rice, black beans, and salchichon (Puerto Rican salami) were common.

Cubans share their version of arroz con pollo, *croquetas* (fried food rolls usually with meat inside), and *yucca frita*. Based on participant observation, the grassy hill overlooking the Central Park rumba is a space where *rumberos* learn and share history. The dire economic realities of Cuba's Special Period had consequences in New York City. Cuban interlocutors I worked with were not particularly anti-Castro, they simply believed that New York City provided more economic opportunities than Special Period and Post-Special Period Cuba. These Cuban *rumberos* were joined by Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Mexicans, Panamanians, and other Latino immigrants that had their own reasons for leaving their home countries.

The *Cuban Rafter Phenomenon*, a virtual online exhibit, says, “From 1991 through July 1994, numbers of rafters rose steadily year by year until 500 were arriving daily during the first two weeks of July 1994 (University of Miami Digital Library Program, 2014). As the increase became public knowledge in Cuba, people began hijacking large government owned boats. In August 1994 three large boats were hijacked in a 10-day period (De la Fuente 1998; Domínguez 1997; Hernandez-Reguant 2009). The Castro government did not impede people from immigrating to the United States. A total of 32, 385 left Cuba between 1994-1995 (University of Miami Digital Library Program, 2014). Informal discussions about immigration with New York City *rumberos* indicate that the mid 1990s and early 2000s was the time of arrival. One of the most influential of the Special Period arrivals, Pupy, arrived in New York City in 1995.

Many interlocutors believed that New York City was the best place to make a living through teaching and performing Afro-Cuban expressive cultures. Cubans seeking artistic opportunities in the United States understood that New York City has a long appreciation of Cuban art forms. Related to this, Cuban artists like Danys "La Mora" Perez, Roman Diaz, and Pedrito Martinez, Pupy, Yesenia, Stevie (Pupy’s son), and Carlos Mateu had the ability to work with Latinos, Africans, African-Americans, Caucasian Americans, English speakers, Spanish speakers, people interested in Afro-Caribbean arts, or people interested in Cuban popular speaks to the fluidity and shifting of racial affiliations. These artists position themselves in New York City’s vibrant art world in strategic ways.

RECORDING ADVANCES: FROM FILM TO DIGITAL

The digital world of the rumba was created by the live performances in New York City and Havana. The movement of the rumba between the physical and virtual worlds has its own separate histories. Created in 2010, *The Rumba* New York City Facebook page connected *rumberos* located in El Barrio, Union City, the Lower East Side, the Bronx, Brooklyn, Alvin Ailey Dance Center dance students, and various students that took classes around New York City. This does not exclude Havana and Miami as two other locations of communication.

Electronic Recording and Dissemination: A Contemporary Example

The living room layout of El Fogon invited audience members to experience the rumba sitting in their chairs. As people loosened up with the three-dollar beer at the makeshift bar, *rumberos* pushed the couches to the back walls to make large half circles for dancing. The space was electronically alive with audio-visual recording devices that flashed bright lights on the circle. David had a large spot light on the main floor that gave a heightened sense of importance to the main performers on the stage. Performance studies scholar Bertha Jottar weaved through the audience sometimes placing her small, hand-held recorder inches in front of the faces of performances. Within hours, Bertha or other audience members posted semi-edited videos on YouTube, usually linked to their Facebook profile pages.

INTERNATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF THE *RUMBA NUEVA*

The transnational sharing most relevant to this study began in the 1950s. This is when knowledge of rumba spread through the recordings of *rumberos* on street corners in East Harlem, the Bronx, and Brooklyn (Jottar 2011). These communities shared by Puerto Rican, Cuban, and African-American communities. Research data suggest these cross cultural borrowings are the precursor what I call the "virtual Afro diaspora."

There is a legacy of transnational communities in the early years of the *rumba nueva.* Lisa Knauer, an anthropologist that focuses on transnational communication within the Cuban Diaspora, acted as a courier for videos between New York City and Cuba in the early 2000's (Knauer 2009a). Cubans living on the Island and New York asked her to record messages for their families, friends, and colleagues (ibid). The messages were personal letters between families. In her influential article, Knauer includes a telling vignette of a Cuban musician that felt he needed to justify his reasons for settling in the United States (ibid). The video messages she transported showed Cubans longing to connect with family and friends despite geographic boundaries. The transfer of videos is an aspect of the *rumba nueva* that displays how Cubans use their available means to maintain connections with family.

Slowly, technology became available for New York City and Havana *rumberos* to record their own performances. Thus, the message boards and social media became a way, although with unequal access between Havana and New York City *rumberos*, to communicate transnationally. Similar to Knauer's astute analysis on the reasons Cubans sent the videos (2009b), *rumberos* sent media to connect with family and friends.

Many of my professional artist interlocutors in Havana were interested in using recorded audio, videos and social media as tools for publicity. Lukumí treated our interviews like auditions. He already understood that he was recognizable to an international audience as the star of the documentary, *Lucumi: Child Rumbero of Cuba*, released in 1995. He convincingly explained why his group, Rumberos de Cuba, was the best group in Cuba. He even advertised their upcoming tour when I interviewed him in February of 2012. Other participants, like Henry and his brother Ralph, asked me to post pictures of them and drums on El Fogon Center of the Art's Facebook profile page. They were hoping to meet the right contacts so they could travel abroad. The contemporary moment in the rumba is closely related to technological advances in social media for Cubans and New Yorkers.

THE RUMBA IN NYC FACEBOOK GROUP

The performance of rumba in physical spaces is only part of the phenomenon of the *rumba nueva*. Several different people recorded the *despidida* (farewell) rumba described in the introduction of this dissertation. Some participants, like David, *El Fogon*'s videographer, used professional video recording equipment. Most people used their cell phones to record moments they thought were especially most dramatic. People that wanted to publicize the night's adventures uploaded the recorded video footage on Facebook, YouTube, and other media sites.

During the later years of the *rumba nueva,* when Cubans in Havana slowly begin creating social media accounts, YouTube and Facebook social media were used by the

majority of interlocutors that used the Internet. Uploaded media content generated debates on authenticity, history, and skill level of *rumberos* at the party. Recorded rumbas posted on Rumba in NYC almost always relate to physical rumbas in New York City or Cuba.

During my first trip to Havana in 2009, I saw a mix of recording and storage devices used by Cubans and tourists for purposes of recording rumba and folkloric performances. As time progressed with subsequent research visits, the recording devices became smaller, more mobile. Storage moved from VHS tapes, to writable DVDs, to small digital devices with direct Internet connectivity. I scoured Internet forums in search of spaces where *rumberos* communicated bilaterally. Afro-Cuba Web led me to web forums created by North Americans who had traveled to Cuba. These forums had links to personal websites of musicians that studied the rumba.

It was still difficult to find ongoing discussions between Cubans living in Cuba and those living abroad. While searching for names of members of Rumberos de Cuba that I met in the Cayo Hueso neighborhood of Havana, I found the Rumba in NYC Facebook group. I read members' information pages to see where they currently lived and the places they had traveled. There was a flow of people, most notably New York City based Cuban *rumberos* that kept in contact with colleagues in Miami and Cuba.

Other websites and social media websites did not offer the same level of dialogue that Facebook did. One type of website advertised rumba lessons for people interested in drumming and dance technique. These were unsatisfactory sites because they lacked records of dialogue between the author and people viewing the web page. I came across

informational websites on rumbas that did not have features that allow users to leave comments for public discussions.

The Rumba in NYC Facebook group is a dynamic group that goes beyond passive knowledge acquisition through webpage reading. It has media, both video and pictures, along with a public message board that gives people the opportunity to post comments. The accessibility, interaction, and usage of Facebook made it the preeminent space for looking at transnational communication between Havana and New York City.

THE FINAL YEARS OF THIS PROJECT THROUGH THE EYES OF PUPY

The transition I use to mark the end of this research project is the death of Pupy in 2012. I do this not because Pupy defined the *rumba*, which by its nature is a collective practice. Nor do I believe the *rumba nueva* ended at this moment. I chose Pupy's death because he signaled the gradual proliferation of rumba participation through audio-visual media viewed from cell phones, personal computers, or tablets. In 2012, multi-media and audio-visual material uploaded on the Internet was a primary method of transferring information on the rumba. To listen to the rumba, fans could stream and download recordings. The rumba continued after the *rumba nueva*, but continuing changes in travel regulations, electronics, and commodification demonstrate a new phase.

Physical travel was still an important aspect of the *rumba nueva.* Travel to Cuba had become easier during the Obama administration. The laws differed greatly from those under the George W. Bush administration. Cubans were permitted to visit the island once every three years rather than once a year like the previous restriction. There was a

redefinition of “relatives” that included only immediate family. The Obama years saw an easing of these restrictions. Bodenheimer (2010, footnote 28, p. 18) wrote, “One of the first acts of the Obama administration was to repeal the Bush administration’s additional restrictions, and in early September 2009 Obama lifted all restrictions related to family remittances and travel between the two countries.” Migration, business licenses, and tourist laws were changing in Cuba. Even more changes were underway.

Toward the end of 2012, it was becoming easier for New Yorkers without familial connections to obtain “people-to-people” licenses to visit Cuba. *Rumberos* who had contacts with tourists were receiving slightly dated, digital camcorders and cell phones with video recorders. It seemed that *rumberos* living in roach-infested, dilapidated apartments in central Havana were being visited by foreign students, relatives, scholars, or gaining occasional access to Facebook. Cuban *rumberos* of different skill levels were arriving in New York City on a monthly basis. Andro Mella, a singer in the famed *Los muñequitos de Matanzas*, one of Cuba’s most respected rumba group, moved to New York City. While *rumberos* were moving to New York City, an elder rumbero was transitioning to the next world.

Towards the End

Pupy lived the rumba. He molded fierce dancers out of North Americans that had no formal training. Pupy’s teaching process provides a window into his understanding of embodied history. Located in the Mott Haven neighborhood of the Bronx, El Fogon was a one room space that hosted rumbas every Friday. Well-known rumberos like Chino and

Congo shared their knowledge, and more importantly, the stage, with younger rumberos like Pete Conga Jr. and Nicky Laboy. Female rumberas, Yomaira and Jadele added a harmonic foundation that most male only rumbas lacked. Pupy had devoted students like Freddy and Eddie Torres Jr. who encouraged people to try to dance the *guaguanco* style of the rumba.

The significance of Pupy's participation at *El Fogon* cannot be understated. Many of the elements of the *rumba nueva* were apparent at the El Fogon rumbas. The rumbas were staged, but they became looser, more community oriented as the night progressed. There was a multi-national, multi-ethnic, multi-classed, and multi-racial constituency of rumberos and community members. There was subtle tension of who knew how to play "authentic" rumba from Cuba and others that liked to add a distinct Afro-Caribbean, New York City flavor.

Pupy was visibly losing weight in the spring months of 2011. There were rumors that the cancer was spreading rapidly. Even Jennifer, Pupy's partner, looked exhausted. Jennifer handled the managerial and financial aspects of Pupy's business. Pupy believed that a Caucasian-American woman would have the cultural capital and knowledge to navigate the financial side of the artistic world (personal communication, El Fogon owners March 8, 2012). In public, she was his dance assistant and personal advocate that helped him stay organized. In the summer of 2011, Pupy left New York City to be with his family in Cuba. Weeks later, he passed away. Jennifer organized a memorial concert at New York City's Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Theatre in December of 2011. Pupy's, opinionated and sometimes-controversial viewpoints helped keep *rumberos* together by

the enormity of his knowledge on Afro-Cuban culture. Disputes over the correct way to honor Pupy's legacy, money, video footage, and simmering rivalries ended the rumbas at El Fogon. The Central Park rumba continued to be a volatile space of African diaspora affirmation and shifting ethnic boundaries.

CONCLUSION

This chapter described important events related to rumba's transnational connectivity through travel, artistic networks, audio-visual recording devices, and social media immerging in the 19th century to the present. Using a historical perspective that included voices from geographically separated rumba communities, I described changing aesthetics related to performance, multi-ethnic participation, and discourses of cultural, sometimes imagined African diasporic family. This chapter described how economic changes in Cuba, including the Special Period, influenced the migration of some of New York's most talented Cuban artists that perform Afro-Cuban dance and music. Danys "La Mora" Perez*,* Roman Diaz, and Pedrito Martinez, Pupy, Yesenia, Stevie, and Carlos Mateu are a few rumberos that arrived during or in the aftermath of the Special Period. They have become experts at negotiating spaces in NYC and Cuba. La Mora has even led cultural trips to Santiago de Cuba for dance students. Carlos has posted media on his Facebook showing his painting and dance accomplishments in Havana and New York City. Yesenia has given dozens of Afro-Cuban workshops around New York City and the East Coast. The next chapter describes the strategic ways Havana *rumberos* use history, ethnic boundaries and affiliations to create strategic diasporic alliances.

Chapter 4 Cuban Ethnic Boundaries, Affiliations, and Strategic Diaspora

This chapter describes the rumba as it was practiced in Havana during the Special Period (roughly 1991-2003) and ending in 2012. My knowledge is formed by preliminary dissertation research for two weeks in Cuba in 2007 before entering graduate school. I then spent a total of six and a half months doing ethnographic research in Cuba from 2010 to 2012. My primary field site in Cuba was Havana. Interlocutors included the director and members of the Conjuncto Folkloríco Nacional (Cuba's National folkloric company), Rumberos de Cuba, Afro-Rumba, *rumberos* affiliated with Yoruba Andabo, *rumberos* without specific groups, Cubans affiliated with the rumba, academically trained Cuban scholars, tourists I met at music events, and employees at the Cuban Ministry of Culture.

Ethnographic narratives do what statistics cannot. The change in economy shifted how *rumberos* explained their artistic practices and expressed their identities. The vignettes I present explore the triumphs and hardships of Havana life from the perspectives of Cubans that create rumba and folkloric performances. The rumba is the backdrop, constituting the critical lens that explores the intersections of race, class, place, Internet social media, and the economies effects on all of these.

Many of the Cuban interlocutors thought that performing Afro-Cuban folkloric culture would bring them notoriety and economic stability in the United States. Thinking in terms of an African diaspora was a method of entering tourist and performance

markets. Instead of theorizing about an abstracted African diaspora, Cuban interlocutors inquired about the professional arts networks of black artists, producers, venue owners, promoters, and academics that could possibly help them play rumba abroad, or create informal, mutually beneficial economic relationships between the United States and Havana. This form of strategic diaspora making involved that idea of a larger "family" that could strengthen networks or remittances was an important aspect of the African diaspora that my interlocutors in Havana envisioned.

The technological changes in Cuba are one of the ways I describe the *rumba nueva* as a new manifestation of the rumba. Technology usage in Havana changed access to staged and informal rumbas. In 2009, I witnessed the Conjuncto Folkloríco Nacional staff using large VHS recorders to document cultural performances. Tourists, on the other hand, used palm-sized camcorders at the Sabado de la Rumba held at the Gran Palenque.

Access to recording technology quickly changed, particularly for the Cubans and *rumberos* I interviewed in late 2011 and 2012. My friend Yeney used a cell phone her sister had sent her from Los Angeles. The phone did not have service, but she was still able to use it as a recording device for making sound files that she could transfer to her laptop. I transferred classic Cuban salsa tunes to my laptop from friends' USB flash drives while in Havana. I watched choppy, short video clips of fiestas, religious ceremonies, informal rumbas, and birthday parties placed on computers. Whether on computer or VHS, I felt obliged to watch these performances even if I did not know the people in the videos. This was all part of the technology and sharing that was part of the *rumba nueva.* The recording of these spaces became broader when they were recorded.

The Internet was the latest in a series of technological advances that altered the ways Havana residents communicated. All of my contacts had a way to connect or knew someone that had access to the Internet. Internet was not available to all *rumberos*, or even most of them. *Rumberos* told me they knew “a person of a person” that could get connected periodically. I was most familiar with *rumberos* that used the Internet through their government or hotel jobs. *Rumberos* used the Internet, audiovisual recording technology, and physical spaces to connect outside of Havana and even Cuba.

My interlocutors described Facebook as the most useful social media platform because it had a minimalist front page that was relatively easy for Cubans to download on home computers with extremely slow connection speeds. *Rumberos* then shared their media with Cubans that had reliable Internet access or foreign friends that uploaded the media to websites capable of hosting videos. Thus, there was a division of who could and could not participate in Internet social media in Havana. The inequality of access was nothing new to *rumberos*. The two-tier economic system already placed Cubans without access to convertible pesos at a disadvantage. The *rumba nueva* is a mix of physical and virtual, points that mirrored socioeconomic divisions among Cubans.

HAVANA AS A MAIN CENTER OF AFRO-CUBAN ARTS AND THE RUMBA

The large number of *rumberos* and tourists made Havana a natural center for popularizing the rumba. Havana was Cuba’s most cosmopolitan place. If Cuba had a Hollywood where young artists traveled to “make it,” Havana would be this location. Instead of a homogeneous community of *rumberos*, many Havana *rumberos* were

originally from Cuba's different provinces. Teresa, from the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional de Cuba, explained that she was from a family of *rumberos* from Matanzas. She grew up with members Los Muñequitos de Matanzas.

Professional Havana *rumberos* are in constant contact with foreigners and tourists. The tourists in turn, filmed the *rumberos* they saw in Cuba. Their footage that they uploaded on YouTube and shared through Facebook reinforced the idea that Havana was the place to see the most skilled *rumberos*. The tourists from Western, developed countries brought electronic devices to record the shows that they saw. Travelers shared information with camcorders, flash memory bars, compact discs, Internet social media, and cell phone recording devices. Some of the tourists left their old electronics with their Cuban hosts in Havana.

The local *rumberos* of Havana influenced national flavors of rumba through high concentration of *rumberos*, numbers of venues to play, and access to tourists. Additionally, Havana's prestigious art schools, like the Instituto Superior de Arte, trained some of the Island's top folkloric performers. Many of the artistic innovations that I discussed in Chapter 3 were created in Havana.

Table 1
Tourist Arrivals to Cuba 2010-2011

	2010	2011	Change %	2010/11	Trend
Total	**2,531,745**	**2,716,317**	**7.29**	**184,572**	↑
Canada	945,248	1,002,318	6.04	57,070	↑
UK	174,343	175,822	0.85	1,479	↑
Italy	112,298	110,432	-1.66	-1,866	↓
Spain	104,948	101,631	-3.16	-3,317	↓
Germany	93,136	95,124	2.13	1,988	↑
France	80,470	94,370	17.27	13,900	↑
Russia	56,306	78,472	39.37	22,166	↑
México	66,650	76,326	14.52	9,676	↑
Argentina	58,612	75,968	29.61	17,356	↑
Venezuela	30,965	34,096	10.11	3,131	↑
Holland	31,787	32,402	1.93	615	↑
Colombia	20,624	24,873	20.6	4,249	↑
Chile	17,521	23,527	34.28	6,006	↑
Switzerland	16,095	18,143	12.72	2,048	↑
Peru	16,049	15,188	-5.36	-861	↓
China	11,247	14,749	31.14	3,502	↑
Brazil	14,367	14,507	0.97	140	↑
Belgium	13,049	14,266	9.33	1,217	↑
Others*	668,030	714,103	6.9	46,073	↑

Source: ONE & the Havana Consulting Group LLC
* In 2010, the makeup of the “other” category consisted of eight nations.

Table 1: Tourist Arrivals to Cuba 2010-2011

Table 1 (above) shows the numbers and origins of tourists visiting Cuba. Table 2 (below) further breaks down the “other” category in greater detail. This data shows that these tourists come to Cuba from countries where electronics are relatively easy to access.

In light of the flow of international travel and the level of interaction between Cubans and visitors to the island, it is not hard to believe my interlocutors when they said

they had several older recording devices. Recording was not difficult for Cubans in the arts. Reliable connections were the difficult part.

Table 2
Breakdown of Tourist Arrivals to Cuba, "Other" Category

Category	**2010**	**2011**	**Growth %**	**2010/11**	**Trend**
Cuban-Americans*	**496,235**	**515,354**	**3.85**	**19,119**	↑
United States	63,046	90,000	42.75	26,954	↑
Portugal	18,762	18,762	0	0	=
Poland	12,793	12,793	0	0	=
Austria	11,486	11,486	0	0	=
Panama	9,656	9,656	0	0	=
Czech Republic	8,855	8,855	0	0	=
Philippines	8,721	8,721	0	0	=
Denmark	8,476	8,476	0	0	=
Rest of the market	30,000	30,000	0	0	=
Total	**668,030**	**714,103**			

Source: ONE 2010 & The Havana Consulting Group LLC
* Growth rate estimated by The Havana Consulting Group.

Table 2: Breakdown of Tourist Arrivals to Cuba, "Other" Category

THEORETICAL GROUNDING FOR CUBAN ETHNOGRAPHY

The Cuban state celebrated the rumba as a symbol of the countries Afro-Cuban, and working class history (Daniel 1995). This section provides a brief theorization of the theoretical frameworks that position the ethnography that follows.

I used aspects of Cubanidad theory because there were different nationalist values on ownership of the rumba in my Havana field sites. The need to preserve the rumba as a Cuban art form was strong in Havana. It could be so pervasive that these ideas of ownership sometimes led to verbal and sometimes physical altercations with New York

City Puerto Ricans that had their own views of rumba, diaspora, and national identity related to the rumba.

Theorizing the Cuban rumba would not be complete without a brief discussion of Fernando Ortiz's "transculturation." Transculturation describes the transformation of a culture due to prolonged contact with one or more other cultures (Font & Quiroz 2005). Ortiz's definition of transculturation builds upon the notion of acculturation due to its central principal that power resides at multiple sites. Ortiz describes the ways ethnic groups mutually alter each other through the continued maintenance of asymmetrical relationships.

The sometimes-romanticized version of Spanish and African genetic and cultural mixture is essential to an understanding of Cubanidad that *rumberos* both utilized and contested. Throughout Cuba's history, elites have pushed to forge a national identity in response to foreign occupation. Jose Martí (1853-1895), a Cuban scholar, nationalist leader, and writer, championed Cubanidad based on the racial mixture of Cuba's different populations (Martí and Gomez 1975). This would supposedly create a new Cuban society that could transcend its racially divided past. In *Manifesto de Montecristi*, Martí affirmed the importance of creating *la raza cosmica* in Cuba. Martí argued that Spanish, African, and indigenous character traits would create a superior race that could transcend each groups' negative qualities (Martí and Gomez 1975). Martí wrote that a race established on mixture, would advance humanity's intellectual and artistic capabilities.

Based on scholarship and ethnography, I theorize Cuban identity as a product of Cuban and Caribbean histories. Key theorists on Cuban and Caribbean identities support this focus (e.g., Fanon 1967; Horowitz 1971; Millete 1999; Mintz 1971; Weinreb 2009). Caribbean agricultural production, migration, and independence movements have all shaped Cuban history as well (Dupuy 2001). The rich culture of Eastern Cuba is partly influenced by the Haitian Revolution. Slave owners from Saint-Domingue (present day Haiti) migrated to Cuba with their human chattel during the years of the Haitian Revolution (La Mora, dance class presentation July 2012; Abbot 2010). La Mora, a Cuban dance teacher who taught at the Alvin Ailey Extension in New York City, taught the Afro-Haitian-Cuban religious and secular dances. Abbot argues that the Haitian Revolution caused an increase in sugar production in Cuba. Envisioning Cuba as a larger part of the Caribbean helps me explain the ways some *rumberos* used strategic diaspora to build alliances in diverse spaces.

The *rumberos*' construction of identity is complicated because Cuba's history is a story of conquest, colonization, independence, the struggle to be economically autonomous from larger countries, and the struggle to find a national voice (Morukian 2003; Chomsky, Carr, and Smorkaloff 2003). Past Cuban scholars' reactionary politics towards foreign occupation is central to historic and contemporary conceptions of *Cubanidad*. José Antonio Saco (1797-1879), a Cuban political scientist and national hero, understood that defining Cuban identity was a prerequisite to rejecting Spanish rule or resisting annexation by the United States (Morukian 2003). Saco's definition of Cuban identity departmentalized African and Indigenous cultural influences (Morukian 2003).

Even though Saco believed in a multi-racial Cuba, he championed a Cuba with a strong Iberian descended majority.

Latinidad Theory

My working definition of *Latino* – specifically Caribbean Latino identity, which encompassed Cuban and the majority of New York City rumba interlocutors – was the tenuous, hybridic merger of several different ethnic and national cultures merged by the institution of slavery. Literature on African, Spanish, and Indigenous cultural practices as the basis of Cuban identity helps support my theory (Aguirre 1976; Alvarez, Carlos, Bliss, and Vigil 2001; Dávila 2001; Eckerstein and Barberia 2002).

I seek to move further in my theorizations of Latino and Afro-Latino by using critical scholarship to support my findings in the field (Bronfman 2004; Dávila 2001, 2008; Delgado, Fraser and Muñoz 1997; Martí 1893; Gracia 2000; González 2010; PBS 2013; Serra 2007). Cuban *rumberos* in Havana usually referred to themselves by their nationality. They often referred to themselves as "Afro-Cuban" when they were speaking about artistic practices, lineages, and Afro-Cuban culture in general. Ortiz advocated the use of the term Afro-Cuban to distinguish the cultures of the emancipated slaves that had mixed with Spanish colonial culture. Although many studies describe Afro-Cuban subjectivities as separate from their "white" or Iberian counterparts, my participants explained they were "performing" or "living" Afro-Cuban culture (Bronfman 2004; Sarduy, Perez and Jean Stubbs 1993, 2000; Sawyer 2006; Yelvington 2001, 2006). They described themselves as Cubans with ancestors from Africa or simply *negros*.

CUBAN RESEARCH BEGINNINGS OF THE RUMBA IN LOS ANGELES

Contacts are an essential aspect of visiting Cuba if a researcher hopes to penetrate the choreographed veneer of staged rumbas. I met my first Cuban contacts through Afro-Brazilian dance community in Los Angeles. I received research fellowships to study Afro-Brazilian dance in Salvador da Bahia and Los Angeles. I took classes with Linda Yudin, the artistic director of the dance company Vivir Brasil. The percussionists, led by Brazilian Luiz Badaró, were essential parts of the classes.

The multi-ethnic ensemble of Brazilians, Cubans, Mexican-Americans, and African-Americans could play the complex rhythms of the Afro-Brazilian religion, *candomblé*, with a crisp clarity. As accomplished artists, they could play Afro-Cuban secular and traditional rhythms also. The class percussionists were part of a multi-national African diasporic community that played different dance classes around Los Angeles. Their knowledge translated into a rich soup of artistic experiences for people outside of their immediate circles.

The dance classes were tense. Not only did we perform highly acrobatic movements, but the dance movements required different emotions. The strenuous classes led to a collective release once the drums stopped. People talked fast, releasing the tension of the dances they just performed. The drummers moved slowly. They finally had a break from the frenetic drumming that the dances required. Their conversations on their next gigs opened new paths that changed the trajectory of my research. Some of the most talented percussionists played at Zanzibar in Santa Monica and Little Temple in East

Hollywood. Zanzibar and Little Temple were the secular places where artists fused the musical styling of Africa and the African diaspora.

I was unfamiliar with the rhythms the percussionists were playing when I first visited these venues. It did not matter; the five-dollar entrance fee was cheaper than any dance class available at the time. I eventually learned that I was listening to Cuban salsa and Cuban rumba. As I learned more about the dances, going to a club to hear recorded Cuban music in sticky floored clubs became less appealing. Each dance style tells a different story. I wanted to know the stories beyond the hip gyrations that ecstatic party goers repeated hours on end at clubs.

I was becoming closer to the contacts that would open the world of the *rumbero* for me. My percussionist friend, John, recommended the Lula Washington Theatre Dance School on Crenshaw Boulevard. The dance school fostered a sense of a cultural diaspora by all the African and African diaspora dance classes it offered. The Center was located at Leimert Park, a center of African-American culture in Los Angeles. I knew the area because I went to the Afro-centric drum circles held on Sundays. For artists like myself, Leimert Park was one of the few places one could experience *four* elements of hip-hop culture (djing, graffiti, bboying, rapping) at Project Blowed on 43rd Place and Leimert Boulevard. When friends talked about going to South Central to connect with other artists of color, Leimert Park was one of the main spaces they referred to.

I enrolled in Afro-Cuban classes taught by Noralys Reyes and Pedro "Muñeco" Aguilar. We called Pedro, "Muñeco de Matanzas" when I was taking classes. Muñeco was an older man with perfectly smooth, charcoal colored skin. He had a raspy voice that

bounced off the dance studio's walls. I learned later that he helped choreograph most of the community Afro-Cuban performances in the Los Angeles area. He was crucial in helping me learn the technical aspects of male rumba movements before I left for Cuba.

Nory helped with the technical and socio-cultural dimensions of the dance. Nory was a master at explaining the symbolic female movements of secularized orisha movements. She spent time working on helping her students maintain a softness in their shoulders. We worked on a variety of hip patterns that made the vertebrae in my back feel like it could separate in unnatural ways. She made loose, intentional hip movements look completely natural. I thought secular Afro-Cuban movement needed to be broad like Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre's broad interpretations of the dance. Contrary to this, Nory used a rooted, grounded, insular movement that differed from the flashy salsa dancing that Los Angeles is known for.

Nory explained the differences between the large concert style movements the smaller, enclosed movements that were common in religious settings. Knowing the difference between the two was what helped me gain entry into Havana rumba networks. Large concert style dancing was inappropriate for packed, informal rumbas where the main goal was to dance in harmony with others.

ENTERING THE FIELD IN CUBA

There were questions on stylistic variations of the rumba that could only be answered by going to Cuba. The *rumba nueva* is strengthened by economic networks. It could be monetary remittances or it could involve having foreign friends stay at the

homes of Cuban family members. Nory understood that a foreigner paying a modest fee for room and board would benefit her family living in a multi-family dwelling in Central Havana. Just as important as the money, she asked if I could use one of my suitcases for items that her family was not able to buy in Cuba. I was learning how the networks of remittances, information, and arts were connected to African diaspora cultural networks. I falsely believed the popularity of Afro-Cuban art forms related to large monetary gains for masters of the art forms. Nory said, and ethnographic work later confirmed, the popularity of the rumba did not always relate to individual wealth for *rumberos*. This was a reason why renting unlicensed rooms could help out artists' families like Nory's.

I read all I could about the rumba. I practiced my dance technique in anticipation of back street dance encounters with legendary *rumberos*. My knowledge was based mostly on low quality documentary VHS videos from the UCLA arts library. My first memorable experience with the rumba was ironically, through a documentary I saw online in 2006. The documentary that changed the trajectory of my graduate research is called *Routes of Rhythm with Harry Belafonte*. I entered graduate school studying Afro-Brazilian dance in Salvador da Bahia. After seeing this video, I decided to change my dissertation focus to the Cuban rumba.

There is an impressive scene in the video with a young boy who is dancing rumba with a polished style characteristic of iconoclastic *rumberos* I have met in Havana. Crisply ironed bell-bottoms pants were the perfect complement to his form-fitted shirt. His outfit showed the angled lines achieved through hours of movement repetition. Movement harmonized by his clothing created an ambiance of cool that I wanted to know

more about. My adornment and moves were ready for an experience that changed my perspectives on the African diaspora.

Nory’s family met me at the José Martí International Airport. Their apartment was just a few blocks from the Malecón. Her family did not participate in rumbas, but they were beneficial in looking at the cultural and economic changes in Cuba that inspired me to reach out to *rumberos* abroad.

Yeney, Nory’s 24-year-old sister, was pivotal in explaining how urban, black and brown males were supposed to act in Havana. She told me that she occasionally went to Afro-Cuban folkloric events with Nory. She mostly went to pass the time after work. Yeney was more interested in Havana’s vibrant reggaeton and timba nightlife. Yeney and her friends knew what the rumba was, but they did not listen to the rumba on a regular basis. Rumba was the music that she heard at school presentations on Cuban history. At the time of participant participation in Havana, many youth, teenagers, and young adults in Havana listened to reggaeton. At hotel’s cabarets, rumba was just one of a variety of musical styles musicians played. The shows were sanitized, highly choreographed representations of popular Cuban music.

Yeney’s circle of female friends took a lot of pride in their physical presentation. Her friends had colored blouses, rip-off designer t-shirts, and faded jeans. The Cubans and *rumberos* I worked with did not have the money to shop in the tourist boutiques in the Havana Vieja neighborhood. Most of their “dress” clothes were sent from relatives or provided by foreign friends. The shortages of the time period did not stop them from accessorizing with what they had. The women might have been poor, Yeney often said,

but they did not have to look like it. Yeney spoke about the tourists that walked along the Prado on a daily basis. She perceived foreign wealth in terms of the items that women could buy to enhance their appearance in relation to their socio-economic level.

Gender roles were one of my first lessons on the rumba. The women thought that was the most important lesson that I needed to learn if I was going to understand rumba in Cuba. Dance lessons in Yeney's opinion, was the least of my worries. Before the dance, I needed to know how to perform outside of the technical movement of the rumba.

Our mornings were informal lessons on how to perform in social settings. Yeney separated the masculine Cuban man from the "cold" North American man. The gendered compliments she suggested related to racial valorization of black identity. For example, she said that complimenting a darker woman's skin tone was generally a good habit. She said "generally" because in formal situations (academic conferences, government settings, doctor's offices, etc) it was better not to mention anything about skin tone or race. She explained that a darker skinned woman had the strength of female orishas such as Oshun or Yemeya. Commenting on Cuban woman's hair when they did not have the money to straighten it was also a way to get on their good side. Dancing the *rumba* was not about performing sexually flirtatious moves according to Yeney. It was about understanding how communication needed to follow established gender roles. How I acted when the music stopped was the most important-the best way to build rapport with the knit community of *rumberos*.

I visited some of Havana's most popular venues in the early weeks of ethnographic research. Similarly, I visited many of the most popular spaces where

rumberos performed. I explored the Cabaret Parisién at Hotel Nacional, Cabaret Tropicana, Habana Café at Hotel Melia Cohiba, Turquino at the Havana Libre Hotel, Casa de la Amistad, El Gato Tuerto, and Delirio Habanero above Teatro Nacional. I experienced different genres of Cuban music from *son* to *salsa.* Musicians played technically intricate sets for diverse crowds of Cubans and foreigners. The performances were a smooth mix of pre-Revolution salon forms. The music provided an unbroken line of Cuban music-making that smoothly connected the rumba in theatrical performances.

I was learning a lot about the atmosphere of staged rumbas in the music venues, cabarets, and patios. My knowledge of the rumba helped me build relationships with other audience members and performers. The practices of visiting these popular spots were helpful in looking at who experienced the rumbas in these relatively fancy places. These venues had a mix of Cubans and non-Cubans. Audience members were not the people that lived in the crowded, crumbling buildings in Central Havana. The Cubans present were mostly friends of tourists, hosts, guides, other musicians, or Cubans that lived abroad.

Yeney and I discovered more of Havana's venues as the days past. Everyone in our group was in their 20s. My Cuban friend's favorite spot was Casa de la Musica in Central Havana. Casa de la Musica had several variety shows throughout the night with top Cuban entertainers. The stage, night and matinee shows had great dancers with a professional command of folkloric, salsa, Broadway jazz, and even studio hip-hop. It was an extravaganza of lights.

The staged shows were just filler for my friends. They waited for the electronic music, reggaeton, and salsa that shook the glasses on the tables. Reggaeton was their favorite style of music by far. Reggaeton had a thumping, steady beat that was easier to dance to than partnered dances. The messages of reggaeton reflected some of the aspirations of both personal and collective wealth for Cubans. Reggaeton had broad popularity among young people in Central Havana that the rumba did not.

After a month in Havana, I felt that I was still a spectator looking inside the insular world of the rumba. I had the perspective as an audience member without the personal, trusting relationships I would need to answer my research questions. I began to understand that the staged shows would only provide so much information about the socio-cultural practices of Havana *rumberos*. I was meeting expert musicians that could play rumba, but they were reluctant to talk to me about topics other than rumba dance and music technique. Rumba sets at the hotels were technically strong with exceptional dancers, but I did not travel to Cuba just to learn technique. The sexually explicit dance exchanges between the male and female dances seemed contrived, almost forced. Audience members swayed slowly side to side as spectators watching a show rather than act as full, active contributors to the rumbas. From time to time, some of the performers invited audience members to dance on the stage. These were great moments to look at aesthetic changes between formal and informal rumbas.

I needed a different method to build strong, personal relationships with *rumberos.* As an audience with only brief times to speak to the *rumberos* that performed, I felt my information was incomplete. To broaden my perspectives from the brief participation at

staged rumbas, I was going to have to separate from Yeney's reggaeton party crew. The professional Cuban musicians at the performances said I needed to talk to the older generation if I wanted to understand how *rumberos* lived outside of the choreographed shows that I had become accustomed to.

I spent less time going out with Yeney and more time in spaces getting to know the geography of Havana neighborhoods. With my pockets filled with *moneda nacional* coins, I took the bus from Central Havana to the eastern and western most suburbs of the town. I traveled from neighborhood to neighborhood, plaza to plaza, house to house when I was invited, to search for the communities and groups of people that performed the rumba on and off the performance stage.

I got up early to listen to the news from the older Afro-Cuban men that played dominoes on the Prado. I met other men that congregated at Parque de la Fraternidad and Parque Central. We sat. We talked about baseball. We talked about soccer. We talked about finding work. They asked about the crime levels in the United States. In slow times when it was not too hot, we churned out simple rumbas with rhythms from our hands. These men were not the professional *rumberos* that could fill night clubs on international tours. They were the regular men who experienced the rumba outside of the staged cabarets. They understood the rumba as a participatory act that anyone could join. They became an important source that I used to find other information resources.

STAGED RUMBAS IN HAVANA

Staged and informal rumbas were the main rumbas that I worked with during the ethnographic period. There were distinctions that were present in the performance. Government sponsored rumbas had a clearer separation between stage and audience based on the stage set-up. Songs usually lasted around five minutes with a repertoire. Rumbas that included other folkloric dance styles usually lasted from one to three hours.

The staged rumbas have a uniform pattern in the dance. The dancing was choreographed with explosive *vacunas* (sexual thrusts in the *guaguanco* style) that were easily perceptible to audiences. The speed of the music determined when the dancers entered the stage. The increase in music tempo and repetition of lyrics was a signal for dancers to enter the open stage areas.

Professional *rumberos* that played staged rumbas were often paid a salary through the Ministry of Culture. Staged rumbas often occurred in patios like the Conjuncto Folkloríco Nacional's Gran Palenque. Nightclubs like Saturno in the Vedado neighborhood, Hotel Lincoln in Central Havana, and the Asociación Cultural Yoruba de Cuba near El Capitolio also hosted staged rumbas. The tension between official regulation, economic incentives to perform for tourists, and the possibility to travel affected the audience that watches the rumba.

I was able to learn about the economic incentives, racial access, and the staged rumbas by the growing relationships I made with interlocutors. Spending time at the Callejón de Hamel, I met two very most energetic rumberos that regularly performed in Havana. Henry, the dancing stage hype-man and his percussionist brother, Rafael, were

my entry into the networks of staged rumbas that helped them enter the mixed market economy that privileges Cubans that have access to convertible pesos.

Their positions as Cubans of African descent from Cayo Hueso (a historically economically disadvantaged Afro-Cuban Havana neighborhood), gave them the knowledge to guide tourists to staged rumbas around Havana. The advantages in this instance for tourists meant having a place to sit in a crowded venue. Henry and Rafael received meals and drinks they would otherwise be unable to purchase. Relationships like these were not uncommon in the staged rumba community.

One of the most famous places for staged rumbas was the Gran Palenque in Havana's Vededo neighborhood. The Gran Palenque is the practice space of the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional. I lived two blocks away at the family home of a friend that lived in Austin. I usually went to the Saturday rumbas by myself even though the family warned against it. Isabel said I would meet "crooks" and "bad men" that would probably rob me.

I was never robbed. I knew who crooks and robbers were. I had seen enough of them while I was conducting research in New York City. "Stick up kids" on the streets of New York City had guns and did not ask questions. Some *rumberos* and *jineteros* (pejorative term for men who connect tourists with cigars, restaurants, *casa particulars,* and sometimes, prostitutes) used a craft of semi-assertive persuasion to part tourists with their money. Darriel, a 25-year-old percussionist that played with his mother in a group called Afro-rumba, said that a Cuban with honor had a legitimate skill or occupation to share with foreigners. In Darriel's mind, maintaining familial relationships, monetarily and socially, through the rumba, was the type of diaspora networks that he understood.

He said a *jinetaro* was *only* thinking of economic exchanges. Isabel saw some of the *rumberos* at the Saturday rumbas as opportunists or outright con-artists. Differences in opinion like these helped me learn how rumbas were spaces of informal exchange that helped many *rumberos* supplement their meager incomes.

Miguel, a man who learned to speak English from spending time with European and Canadian tourists, provided further insight. I saw him every week at the Saturday rumbas at the Gran Palenque. I never saw him at an informal rumba with an audience of only Cubans. He is what I would call a *pseudo-rumbero* because he did not drum, dance, sing or actively participate in the artistic aspects of rumbas. He sold bottled water to tourists at rumba gatherings. He described the rumba as a business space that helped support numerous people. He had a valid point. There was an entry fee that guests paid. Wait staff and bar tenders received tips. Taxis waited outside to drive tourists back to their hotels. Cubans took *máquinas*, the colloquial term for taxis specifically for Cubans that accepted *moneda nacional.* Performers rehearsed so they could present a professional program. Tour companies were able to coordinate group tours for tourists in search of Afro-Cuban culture. *Rumberos* from various groups could sell compact music discs to audience members. This is to say there was a lot of economic activity outside of the intense music making at staged rumbas.

Staged rumbas in Havana supported people outside of the immediate circle of rumba performers. Miguel once said, “If everyone else is making money, why shouldn’t I?” (Personal communication, February 20, 2012). If rumba was a lifestyle like many *rumberos* proudly proclaimed, then it was not hard to understand this belief system.

Henry and Lukumí, *rumberos* that I will speak more about later, related that Special Period food shortages continued in *barrios marginales* (low income or impoverished neighborhoods). The staged rumba was an artistic form that created a space of personal expression and possible economic benefits. This reality influenced the relationships I made with interlocutors at the staged rumbas.

Simply calling the rumbas "staged" makes the rumbas seem more formal than they really were. For example, once the rum flowed, the *Sabado de la rumba* (Saturday rumbas) at the Gran Palenque and rumbas at the Callejón de Hamel became a sweaty, pulsating mass of bodies. The staged rumbas rarely started on time. They usually started an hour or two after the scheduled times. Foreign guests, government officials, and honored, older *rumberos* had seats close to the front. Their preferential seating disappeared when social barriers faltered with the increase in the tempo of the music. At the Callejón de Hamel, there was a thin rope that separated the audience from the performers. The proliferation of the staged rumbas is an interesting aspect of the *rumba nueva* that coincides with the changing Special Period economy and the duel economy that came about after.

INFORMAL RUMBAS

Contrasting formal and informal rumbas gives me the analytic tools to decipher how race, economy, and time influence the rumbas. Informal rumbas were highly improvisational gatherings without government management of any kind (Daniel 1995). Informal rumbas take place in the livings rooms, sidewalks, alleys and small plazas of

Havana. The starting times are fluid. They begin when the musicians have the tools they need to create music.

I experienced these rumbas in crumbling, collective patios throughout Havana. Informal rumbas were the reason I began studying rumbas. The dances were very similar to the hip-hop gatherings that shaped my interest in understanding cultural production. The rich sound reverberated through the high ceilings. Other times, informal rumbas would start after Afro-Cuban religious events. I was most familiar with the *bembé* of *Santería*. After the *bembé*, the drummers would begin to play rumba. Being able to experience the intimate spaces of religious ceremonies was only possible with my relationship with Darriel's group, Afro-Rumba. They took me on adventures through narrow streets of Havana to participate in rumbas outside of the more popular staged rumba venues.

The informality and extensive community participation of informal rumbas were closer to the original rumbas performed by freely emancipated enslaved people in the late 1800s. Technique was shared through master drummers within Havana communities. The formal rumbas were parties without some of the parameters of the staged rumbas. Ethnographic research at informal rumbas was only possible with a trusting relationship with *rumberos*.

The scarcity of informal compared to staged rumbas is one of the main reasons they are so prized by tourists interested in Afro-Cuban culture. Since informal rumbas are community events, usually among friends, family, and colleagues, they are hard to learn about if familial relationships are not made.

KEY INDIVIDUAL RUMBA CONTACTS

While building relationships in Havana, I met individuals that helped explain the socio-cultural realities in Havana. Just as important, they led me to other individual and institutional contacts.

Darriel helped me look deeper into access and authenticity at rumbas and religious, ceremonial events. Darriel and Afro-Rumba helped me look at the tensions between playing sacred and secular music for Cubans. Another guide, Henry, was a *rumbero* who helped me understand the world of professional and semi-professional *rumberos* that made money by entertaining tourists at restaurants. Living in the Cayo Hueso neighborhood, we made trips through other Havana locations, mostly Havana Vieja and San Lazaro neighborhoods. Most people that have experienced rumba in Havana will be familiar with Henry's charismatic energy that enhances staged rumbas.

One of the most charismatic young *rumberos* I met was Lukumí. Lukumí was one of the stars in Rumberos de Cuba. The group had a mix of young and old with some former members of the Conjuncto Folklórico Nacional. He spoke about his international aspirations bluntly. He was the rumbero that helped me look at the tensions between the local and international commodification of the rumba for foreign audiences.

Lastly, Leonel, a former dancer in the group Danza Contemporanea, helped me make contact with rumberos that did not actively perform publicly. Leonel also introduced me to *rumberos* that performed at the National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba, UNEAC). Along with being a

great connector, Leonel taught me how to dance the rumba properly without Western concert dance flourishes.

DIASPORA, STRATEGIC DIASPORIC NETWORKS, AND ECONOMICS IN THE *RUMBA NUEVA*

Building relationships with *rumberos* often occurred during their daily routines. We talked while visiting government ration stands to buy subsidized vegetables. Our talks about social changes happened while we fixed aging apartments. We shared meals. When we shared meals, it seemed that we always talked about other people just as much as we talked about ourselves. We talked about economic survival, race relations in the United States, New York City winters, street violence, Obama's support of Cuban immigration, cost of living, job accessibility, North American women, and the music business. In addition to these seemingly random topics, *rumberos* gave frequent personal narratives about loved ones that immigrated.

We sometimes had heated debates when my opinion did not match up to the stories they received about life in the United States. For example, Darriel had a hard time believing that there were a significant amount of Latinos that lived in the United States. His collection of copied North American DVDs rarely had Latinos as leading characters. He showed me pictures he had of friends that moved to the United States and asked if they were accurate representations of life in the United States. These pictures were mostly scenes of personal wealth and prosperity. The pictures I showed Darriel were a collection of pictures with Cubans and a variety of ethnicities practicing rumba in

informal spaces. Darriel was more accustomed to seeing Cubans in the United States teaching performing arts classes and performing. I, like the other foreigners Darriel knew, showed parts of our realities through personal, recorded media. The pictures and video circulated by hand, mail, email and shared through USB memory sticks influenced the ways *rumberos* viewed about success abroad. These curated representations of life outside Cuba displayed material and sometime commercial success that did not always match reality. I believe my interlocutors knew this, a reason they asked me so many questions.

Darriel and I first met through dance. We met at the front steps of the Capitolio building during a capoeira demonstration. The *capoeiristas* played the *berimbau* while I danced Bay Area Style hip-hop dance. Darriel danced a similar style to the rhythm of reggaeton. The similarities in our dance styles gave us two common languages; Spanish and dance. The similarities of dance styles demonstrate how urban dances of African descent traveled through the Americas. Darriel was interested in much more than dance style similarities. Growing up in Special Period Cuba, Darriel hoped to ameliorate the poverty that he and his family lived in. The diaspora that Darriel was familiar with was connected to both the arts and resources.

When I first met him in 2011, I was perplexed why someone was so adamant that I stay at the home he shared with his mother and grandfather. I understood that he liked my research, but there were dozens of other North Americans studying folkloric dance in Cuba. After a few weeks of probing, he made it clear that the money I would pay for rent would help feed his family. While he was feeding his parakeets on a July afternoon, he

asked me if I could take watermelon out of the refrigerator for lunch. I opened the refrigerator and saw the emptiness that was a door lined with mildew. There was a half-slice of watermelon with large, black seeds. I think this was a choreographed move to show me how he was living. With his back still turned to me, Darriel said he sometimes skipped meals because he did not have enough food when relatives visited unexpectedly. I knew there was truth in his words. When we would spent long days on Havana streets talking with other *rumberos*, *santeros*, and musicians, he usually ate when hospitable friends offered rice and beans. The best times he ate were when his band played ceremonies in honor of the orishas. The money and the food shared at the ceremonies were part of the strong incentives for his group to drum at these ceremonies.

Darriel constantly asked for the strong adhesive band aides I bought from Target. His fingers usually had cuts after a long night of percussion playing. I was running low on the band aids and asked him if he received band aides from the free clinics in Havana. He invited me into the bathroom and slowly opened the drawers looking for the adhesive wrap he received from the clinic. He meticulously opened the bathroom drawers to show a few bottles of shampoo and medicines. To Darriel, there was a difference between access and having the money to actually buy quality products. Darriel said the free or subsidized products did not compare to the foreign products that were accessible in countries outside of Cuba.

Darriel's vision of diaspora also included economic partnerships. He assumed that as an African-American, I would understand the need to participate in underground economies to provide for my family. He explained that it was common for Afro-Cubans

in Havana to use the black market because they could not afford basic items that made life a little easier. Darriel asked for aspirin, ibuprofen, multi-vitamins, soap, toothpaste, lotion, underwear, all weather jackets, bottles of peroxide, tampons, make-up for women with dark brown skin, and hair products for black women. Darriel was going to pass these items to family and his networks in Havana. This is not to say that Darriel was going to share these items for free. He hoped to sell, use, or barter the items to acquire favors from others.

Darriel's vision of diaspora was connected to race and privilege. Throughout the time I spent with Darriel at rumbas in Havana, he used *blanca* (white person) and wealth interchangeably. He explained that the few African-Americans he connected with (compared to white North Americans, Canadians, and Europeans) felt an obligation to give extra items they had because they understood the effects of living poor. He said he knew some African-Americans that sent care packages to their Cuban hosts even though they were not family. On the contrary, Darriel said white people bought their Cuban hosts more and returned to Cuba more often.

Darriel's explanations were beneficial because I was able to look at how a normal rumbero conceptualized the connections between race, diaspora and rumba. Darriel said that as an "honorary" member of his family, he would not ask me to help pay for groceries. As an honorary member of the family, he helped me buy groceries using the much cheaper *moneda national* currency that Cubans used. I did not have to shop at the expensive stores that most foreigners visited. I was slowly brought into the networks of skirting certain laws to make life a little more manageable. Darriel did expect a return on

his investment for allowing me to follow his group throughout Havana. He wanted me to help him access spaces in the United States if he ever moved to New York City or Miami. He wanted me to pass his group's contact information to influential producers in New York City. Darriel expected me to help him navigate international artistic and educational institutional barriers that kept poor Cubans like him on the outside.

When I began this project, an unknown researcher in the tight-knit Havana rumba scene, I was only able to witness, record, and participate in these rumbas because my guides invited me. Access to private rumbas was only possible with entry into trusted networks of *rumberos*. With the group, I traveled throughout Havana looking at how space affects the experiences of rumba participants in informal rumbas. I noticed that dancing at the staged rumbas differed from the informal ones. Teresa's words rang true when she said that my dance was too "showy" for the subtle expressions that took place at informal rumbas. The big movements that worked well in a salon could hinder the communal dancing process when the movements of the community began to sync together. There would not be enough from for everyone to dance. Above all, the *rumba nueva* was about the act of joining community. Iconoclastic dancing was welcomed if it still gave others a chance to dance. Most of the times dancing had to be small because space was limited.

I use the term "strategic diaspora" to understand how some *rumberos* viewed the African diaspora as set of relationships. Before I made trusting relationships with interlocutors in Cuba, our conversations were generally about my professional connections in the United States and if I could help rumba groups book performances.

I had no pretensions about the depth of some of these relationships. Lukumí was the child prodigy that played with legendary *rumberos* Tata Güines and Pancho Quinto. Lukumí reached early fame when he starred in his own documentary film. Lukumí had a strong sense of his place in the rumba. He hoped to travel to the United States, Europe, Asia, and anywhere else his immense talent would be received. Even as an internationally recognized musician from his tours and the documentary, Lukumí did not have access to the Internet. He represented the ambitions of young *rumberos* that looked beyond Cuba's shores for success. They understood the global cultural market that traveling *rumberos* worked within. Lukumí's insights helped me look at access and the few *rumberos* that were able to travel.

Lukumí was blunt with why he wanted to be part of this research project. He was not interested in my skills as an artist. He was already at the top of his game in terms of the rumba. I had access to institutions that could make his group's travel more lucrative. He also knew that I could post the audio, video, and possible tour dates on my Facebook page. Some professional *rumberos* that could get access to the Internet used it as a way to promote themselves to the wider public abroad. There were countless informal interactions with *rumberos* that included conversations about how "authentic" their rumba and folkloric shows were. They spoke in terms of an African diaspora to describe artistic inspiration but also in terms of their position among other artists that performed African diasporic art forms in Cuba and abroad.

Informal rumbas were also videotaped and shared on Rumba in NYC. Instead of just dancing and music making, these videos included more personal conversations with

people at informal rumbas. The point of these videos sometimes included personal accounts in addition to showing the artistic prowess of *rumberos*. These videos were closer to what Knauer (2009b) calls "audiovisual remittances." I watched these personalized videos with friends that wanted to show more personalized aspects of the *rumba*.

Through interviews with *rumberos* in New York City that lived in Havana previously, I learned that the personal, treasured videos were only uploaded later. These videos worked well when *rumberos* moved to the United States and wanted to show footage of their experiences in Cuba. I saw videos from the 1980s, the special period, and the early 2000s uploaded by *rumberos* and friends of *rumberos* during their trips to Havana. The informal rumbas in Cuba were a type of currency; a calling card proclaiming that the *rumbero* experienced rumbas outside the tourist friendly, inclusive staged rumbas. Informal rumbas were mostly members (community) only events.

Not everyone believed that social media publicity was beneficial. Rumba and folkloric groups survived because they were populated with knowledge barriers that taught valuable information to future practitioners. One such person was Teresa. On a warm Monday morning in March of 2011, On Industria Street, a few blocks from the Prado in Central Havana, I hailed a taxi to travel to the Conjuncto Folkloríco Nacional's studio. The taxi driver did not know where the Gran Palenque was. He asked for directions twice once we were in the tree lined Vedado neighborhood where the studio was located. Even this driver, born in Santiago de Cuba, did not know where the Gran Palenque was.

I set up an interview beforehand. I waited in the large lobby for about an hour. The receptionist told me she was out buying vegetables. I watched the study flow of dance students walk in and out of their classes. She finally entered the complex with an assured confidence. She was a humble, dark brown skinned woman. Teresa, from Matanzas, was a teacher, singer, and dancer in the Conjuncto. She was one of the Conjuncto's living repositories of knowledge. She had a deep knowledge of the innovations that took place within the rumba. Even Teresa, a respected *rumbera* did not have the financial means to use the Internet on a regular basis. She was unfamiliar with the ways younger *rumberos* used technology to connect with *rumberos* living in the United States.

Teresa had given workshops in the United States, Europe, Japan, and Mexico. She was one of the select groups of *rumberas* who had the opportunity to travel abroad with her talent. She scoffed at the idea that people in the United States could learn from watching videos of Cubans. She expressed that the rumba was something that students should learn by *doing* (Teresa, personal communication with the author, February 2012). If people were only watching the rumba, then the act of community building, in the present, was lost. I explained how some *rumberos* used the Internet to connect with family, other *rumberos*, and show how they performed the rumba in Cuba.

Teresa asked which older *rumberos* filmed themselves and used Facebook to upload rumbas. Teresa brought up a very important point. The people filming the *rumberos* often were not the *rumberos* themselves. The virtual African diaspora was not just about *rumberos*, but included the people that filmed them. This was part of the

rumba nueva. Teresa complicated my idea of the virtual African diaspora and who had access to it.

THE CUBAN STATE AND THE RUMBA

The Revolutionary Cuban government has had a long history of supporting and structuring the performances of rumba in Cuba. Bodernheimer (2010, 66) wrote, "Since the beginning of the Revolution and the creation of the National Culture Advisory in 1961 (subsequently transformed into the Ministry of Culture in 1976), a cultural infrastructure was created that has allowed them to engage in paid creative activities full-time."

My informants were sometimes reluctant to talk about salaries they received from the government and club venues. Relating to masculinity, they were proud that they could provide for their families and not rely on informal relationships with tourists. The work of Robin Moore (2006) and Bodenheimer helped feel the gaps in my ethnographic work. Bodenheimer (2010, 65) said:

> In 1968 the state subsidization and employment of all professional cultural workers was fully centralized, and *empresas* (artistic agencies) were instituted in order to coordinate all performances, professional evaluations and salaries. A rating system was introduced in order to evaluate musicians and dancers and decide whether they merited professional status or not.

This professional status and money *rumberos* received did not afford all *rumberos* the respect I thought they deserved. As foreign tourists enjoyed the restaurants and small

boutiques selling Cuban wares, my world included being asked questions about my nationality and citizenship. Asked to show identification was a constant when walking with friends to dance classes. We were stopped more often if we had a person that looked like a white North American or European. If rumba was such an important part of the national culture, why were interlocutors I worked with, who usually carried the tools of *rumberos* (*cajones*, congas, *campanas,* etc), looked like professional practitioners of Afro-Cuban art forms, treated like they did not belong in spaces where they were in close proximity to tourists?

There was a racial and regional aspect to being detained. When interlocutors or men on the streets were stopped to show their identification cards, the police looked to see if they had a Havana residence. Most of the time they had a Havana address on their identification cards. If they did not have a Havana residence, they were asked the reason for their stay in Havana. They were then asked their business in the area and where they were going. The specific questions about their place of residence related to the 1997 law that says that Havana residents must register with the local police (Bodenheimer ibid, 32). Even when they did have residence, they were asked what they were doing in the central section of Havana near tourist areas. "Non-Havana residents must have a "legitimate" reason to be in the capital, such as visiting a family member or working there temporarily through the auspices of a state agency, and must register with the local police for a finite period of time"(Bodenheimer ibid, footnote 21, pg.33). The men that had so much power in the space of the rumba anxiously explained their business to police that sometimes seemed bored or indifferent.

My interlocutors had a perspective that deepened my understanding of race in Havana. People that were from the Eastern provinces, that resided in Havana illegally, were commonly thought to be black and sometimes backwards as compared to the supposedly more cosmopolitan Havana native. Bodenheimer writes, “Owing to the stereotype of *Orientales* as petty criminals and hustlers, and the already large proportion of them in the capital, they are less likely to be given authorization to stay in Havana for a non-work related reason, and many do in fact stay in Havana “illegally” (ibid 33)”. During my research, I did not hear the *palestino* term that Bodenheimer discusses in her work. In Vedado, by the Conjuncto’s *Gran Palenque*, I asked why police were stopping young men even when there were no tourists present. I wondered how much information police could find from un-digitized identification cards. Isabel said they might not have an actual place to stay, but roam the streets looking for work or people to hustle. Isabel said they were probably from the east.

By the east, she most likely meant Oriente, which includes Las Tunas, Granma, Santiago de Cuba, Guantánamo and Holguín. I did not understand at the time, but Isabel was speaking about race in coded language. This became clearer after I did more research on the relationships between race and region. It was an implicit understanding that Cubans understood. Bodenheimer said:

> “Orientales from the provinces of Santiago and Guantánamo are associated with a criminal blackness, evidenced by the racial and regional profiling they are subjected to by state police on the streets of Havana… social/racial blackness is

projected onto all of Oriente and its population regardless of skin color, as a way of implying inherent inferiority, poverty, and/or criminality" (56).

Isabel used the word *indocumentado* (undocumented) to explain the men who "roamed" the streets looking to hustle tourists. To Isabel, the police stopped the men because their status sas "undocumented" and "jobless". Their race was inconsequential according to Isabel. Isabel said that Havana was crumbling- that there was not enough room for everyone to move to the capital. She was referencing the 1997 law previously mentioned. Howe said, "This law requires that people get government permission before moving to Havana. Inspectors must verify that the new lodging in Havana affords adequate sanitary conditions and at least ten square meters of space per person" (1998, 37). Even as *rumberos* were essential to Havana's tourist economy, their race was still0020factored into their treatment by law enforcement.

The *rumberos* were at one time valued for their ability to create art that the Cuban government viewed as useful while sometimes treated like petty criminals. Bodenheimer says, "There are some negative effects of rumba practice and government censorship. Many artists have suffered from direct censorship and even punishment by the Cuban government, most acutely during the *quinquenio gris*, the five-year "grey stretch" that began in the early 1970s and constituted an era of extreme repression (Bodenheimer ibid, 66)". In the final years of the rumba, the government censorship had decreased; a direct relation to Cuban's broadening tourist trade (Bodenheimer ibid, 66). The government and economic changes have shaped the rumba, but only time will tell if the rumba continues to fit tourists' narratives as the Cuban economy continues to open to foreign investment.

GOVERNMENT AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTACTS IN HAVANA

Recent developments in relation to the *rumba nueva* and government support helped me understand the economic advantages of sponsorship. In February of 2012, the *Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba* (UNEAC) declared the Cuban rumba as a national cultural heritage. This is an important step in becoming an UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) Intangible Cultural Heritage. The pride this brought to the audience of influential Cuban *rumberos* was palpable. The national recognition of rumba would most likely mean further integration in the growing *folkloric* tourist trade. The sundrenched patio was alive with talk of collaborations that would alleviate the economic reality of being working poor in an economy that favors people who can obtain convertible pesos. The *rumberos* understood that the market for rumba was going to expand. As we talked through the early evening, interlocutors were interested in the depth of my institutional connections in the United States. They knew professional social scientists are usually connected to educational institutions. Those institutions, similarly to their Cuban counter-parts, could sponsor residencies and facilitate the process to obtain travel visas. *Rumberos* were keenly aware of the implications that this new recognition brought. They knew the language of "cultural heritage" that was becoming a type of currency in local and global cultural institutions.

DIRECTOR OF THE CONJUNCTO FOLKLORÍCO NACIONAL FOLKLORÍCO

Teresa led me to one of the leading officials in the Conjuncto Folkloríco Nacional. I will not use official titles as to provide privacy of Cuba's national folkloric

group. One of the directors introduced me as an anthropologist at an important staged rumba. The director believed that an academic critique of the Conjuncto could bring added legitimacy to the group's cultural preservation pedagogies. The Conjunto's stated mission was to preserve Afro-Cuban dance and music in their distinct manifestations. One of the managers presented me with the group's media promotional kit. By spending time with the director at UNEAC (*Unión* Nacional *de Escritores* y Artistas *de Cuba*), I was able to listen to some of the conversations *rumberos* told about performing in other Cuban cities. Traveling, receiving payment, government contracts, and foreign students were all part of these conversations.

Government sponsorship logically influenced rumba creation. The ways I described the rumba, in terms of song length, seating, spaces, and inclusion in folkloric cultural events relates to educating audiences on Cuban cultural traditions. Government sponsorship can lead to incentives to make rumbas that conform to the State's vision of what the rumba should be. Consequently, rumbas did not contain overt, explicit political rhetoric. On the contrary, if *rumberos* demonstrated their musical dexterity, provided concise performances that did not offend audiences, received training, and were able to perform different folkloric art forms were able to reach professional status more easily. The possibility of recognition and travel, fostered by the Cuban government influenced the ways the rumba was played artistically.

CONCLUSION

The chapter discussed some of the ways *rumberos* survived the difficult realities of post-Special Period Havana. By building networks in and outside of Cuba, *rumberos* formed diaspora networks that helped increase their artistic visibility. I understand this as a strategic diaspora that facilitated routes for, in my experiences, highly skilled, but commodified performances of the rumba. Interlocutors related the African diaspora to the networks of communication and remittances that is common in the Cuban diaspora. Before entering the field, my understanding of the African diaspora was mostly based on theory and artistic practice. Interlocutors' views were more concrete, dominated by a desire to participate in local or international African diaspora folkloric arts markets. The Cuban government was a patron that could authorize *rumberos* to travel abroad.

The Ministry of Culture was not an impenetrable, monolithic entity; my contacts in the Conjuncto knew well-placed people in the ministry. *Rumberos*, some working at professional artists paid through the government, worked with Cuban institutions for their own advantages. The nationalistic beliefs that the rumba was an intrinsic part of Cuba's heritage sometimes led to conflicts with New York City *rumberos*. The next chapter will discuss the ways these shifting national, ethnic and racial affiliations challenged African diaspora belief systems in New York City rumbas.

Chapter 5 NYC Ethnic Boundaries and Affiliations

Figure 1: Bow Bridge in Central Park, New York City, undated.

The drummers sit on the benches facing the water while singers and dancers face the drummers. The grassy area is where conversations and networking take place.

THE ROUTES AND ROOTS OF NEW YORK CITY

New York City has a long history of nourishing Afro-Cuban inspired musical traditions from mambo to the rumba (Boggs 1992; Sublette 2007; Moore 2006; Andrews-Swann 2011). I argue that New York City performances of the *rumba nueva* offer familial gathering places that facilitated diasporic identities. The socio-cultural

implications of transnational diasporas in the *rumba nueva* are changing notions of race, identity, nationality, and belonging. Performance shifts in the *rumba nueva* provides perspectives on racial identity and racial performance.

This chapter describes changing racial identity in relation to 1) changing beliefs in an African diaspora forged by "diasporic identities" in New York City and 2) the socio-cultural implications of performances of identity related to race, gender, and class. Additionally, this chapter describes ethnic conflicts from Cubans that had a more nationalistic ownership of the *rumba* compared to established Nuyorican and multi-ethnic *rumberos* in NYC. Discussing the rumba's *roots*, *routes*, and *spaces* that forged diasporic identities illuminates the fluidity of performances in New York City rumbas.

Miami and Little Havana neighborhoods are generally seen as the best locations to study the Cuban diaspora (Aguirre 1976; Eckerstein and Barberia 2002; Richardson 1989; Darriel, personal communication, July 6, 2010). The strong networks of Cuban artists, forged through decades of immigration, makes New York City a prime location to study the Cuban diaspora (Chasteen 2004; Guridy 2010; Jottar 2009, 2011; Moore 1997; Sublette 2007). Furthermore, New York City is an excellent place to study multi-ethnic African diaspora formation.

Andrews-Swann notes, "That Cuban place-making occurs in the US at all demonstrates people's desire to maintain a connection to a version of home they remember fondly, despite ideological and political challenges" (2011, 12). The ways that Cubans create identities in communities in Miami, Florida, New York City, New Jersey, and California demonstrates that Cubans are able to create spaces of *home* wherever they

migrate. Andrews-Swann further observes, "In the context of migration, migrants— or exiles—remember their surroundings so that a hybrid landscape emerges, combining specific elements of both the home and host countries (2011, 12)." Rumba spaces in New York City are hybrid spaces that are not perfect recreations of Havana or other locations of Cuba. Within the rumbas, *rumberos* negotiate multiple intersecting identities.

TENSION BETWEEN NEW YORK *RUMBEROS* AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

Rumberos and city officials in New York City have not had a cozy relationship like performers and the Cuban Government in Havana. During the Rudolph Giuliani administration (1994-2001), the administration's "quality-of-life" initiatives and its "zero tolerance" policy posed a direct affront to spaces where Latino and Afro-descendant bodies congregated (Jottar 2009, 1). Consequently, the black and brown bodies that filled public spaces were just as significant as their musical instruments.

TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANTAGES IN THE NEW YORK CITY RUMBA

The audiovisual recording component of New York City rumba's was unique. Differing from Havana rumbas, where audiovisual documentation was recorded mostly by visiting foreign participants, New York City video recordings were documented by longtime *rumberos* based in New York City. Consequently, race, gender, and sexuality were broadcast beyond the immediate spaces of the rumbas. Mentioned in Chapter 3, *rumberos* in New York City originally learned how to play rumba by listening to records and practicing with Cuban musicians (Jottar 2011). Jottar writes:

> Thus, with the exception of the Nuyoricans Abe Rodríguez, who worked for Totíco, Yeyito, who learned with Papaito, and Eddie Bobé, who learned with Frankie Malabé, the most prominent way that this Nuyorican generation learned traditional rumba during the 1970s was, as mentioned above, by listening to the recordings whose lead players were actually the local Cuban *rumberos* in New York (2011, 10).

Audiovisual recordings traded in the 1990s and 2000s were the next phase of technological development in transnational communication and distance learning. Besides telephones, Internet social media was one of the most recent ways that New Yorkers remotely connect to Havana rumba communities. Along with the new media, waves of Cubans arrived to New York City during the Mariel Boatlift (April through October in 1980), arrived during the Special Period, or as recently as the 2010s to rejoin family in New York City. These issues will be discussed in detail in this and the following chapter.

STRUGGLES FOR AUTHENTICITY AND DIASPORA IN NEW YORK CITY

The *rumba nueva* in New York City presented a shift in audience, practice and self-identification. Cubans, who make up more of than half of the participants at Central Park rumbas, shared the space with Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Panamanians, African-Americans, Mexicans, Columbians, and Americans of European descent. Interlocutors at informal outdoor rumbas, staged rumbas, and dance classes believed that Cuba was the creative home of the rumba. Nevertheless, *rumberos* created practices unique to New

York. Puerto Rican flags in the shapes of necklaces, t-shirts, and even earrings permeated rumba spaces. Based on ethnographic narratives, New York City *rumberos* articulated an authenticity that differed from Cuban representations.

Authenticity is at the core to performances of the rumba in New York City. In conversation with Roland's study of Cuban authenticity, field data confirmed that authenticity in New York rumba communities is related to race, skin color, Spanish speaking ability, nationality, gendered practices (that can be transgressed during certain times) and spiritual beliefs (Roland 2011). These nodes are not static, but are fluid and related to performance. Racial identities are critical in maintaining *authenticity* among *rumberos*.

Anthropologist John L. Jackson (2001) has provided sociological insights into social interactions in inner-city spaces. In his ethnography of Harlem, Jackson argues that racial authenticity is often achieved through performances and practices. These performances are about the observable behaviors, practices, and social performances that inform others that a person is a native of Harlem. Jackson makes the argument that these racial performances are class marked. For example, Jackson says inner-city African-American males perform a working class ethic. Skin color does not necessarily mean that a performer is racially authentic. Jackson writes that these performances are difficult to manage (Jackson 2001). Consequently, performances are a continual act, a continual negotiation between the performer and audiences that define the authentic.

Prominent Performances Covered by the Broadcast Media

In addition to the Los Muñequitos de Matanzas's US tour stop in New York City and Ballet Folklórico Cutumba's 2011 *Dance Africa* performance in Brooklyn, there has been a steady increase in interest of the rumba in New York during the 2000s up to the time this dissertation was written. From Kirby's *New York Times* article (1998) about law enforcement confrontations with New York based *rumberos*, Ryan Rankine and Heidi Groskreutz's Cuban rumba performance on season two of Fox's *So You Think You Can Dance*, and Rother's *New York Times* article on Pedrito Martinez's debut CD with his band, the Cuban rumba has received recent mainstream media attention. Performance groups from Cuba and increased media representation has directly altered the notions of authenticity and the substance of the diasporic identities that link Havana, New York City, and the Internet social media site Rumba in NYC.

A Close Reading of a Pedrito Martinez Performance

My first awareness of attributes of New York City rumba authenticity was at SOB's in February of 2011. This is a West Village musical landmark that hosts a wide variety of music acts from around the globe. SOB's hosts a variety of Latin American and Caribbean music acts, from Haitian *kompa* to Brazilian *samba* to Cuban bands on international tours.

My knowledge of the rumba had become stronger. I knew the chorus of some of the Muñequitos's most popular songs. I could not play the drum, but I could maintain a study rhythm with the claves. My Caribbean-Spanish dialect was also at a level to where

I could easily understand the rhythmic alliterations of Spanish spoken by *rumberos.* My ability to dance all three styles – *yambú, gauaguanco*, and *columbia* – was one of my main tools in starting conversations with potential research participants. I searched the Internet to find places where staged rumbas occurred. SOB's was hosting a night called "Rumba Carnival." With a name like this, I knew *rumberos* would be present.

When I arrived at the venue, the doorman said the night's headliners were a Cuban *timba* band. *Timba* is a hard driving style of salsa music that has funk, jazz, soul, and pop influences. I cannot remember the name of the Cuban group that played that night. The opener, Pedrito Martinez, was the night's opening act. I did not know at the time, but I was about to witness one of the most musically influential *rumberos* performing in New York City at the time.

Pedrito's mastery of Afro-Cuban percussion was unparalleled. He could play rumba, salsa, *timba, son,* Afro-Cuban religious music with the *batá* drums, and even follow complicated Latin jazz rhythms. Watching Pedrito helped me understand what authenticity meant in New York City. This opening ethnographic vignette leads to other tropes of authenticity in the New York rumba community that I will continue to explore throughout this chapter.

I arrived at SOB's early. Like most times I conducted fieldwork in New York City, I went by myself. I had breath mints, a handkerchief, and a paper notepad for good measure. These were the days before I downloaded a mobile notepad program on my iPhone. It was not Memorial Day, but I had my white pants complimented by off-white loafers, polished with a white *kangol* hat. My adornment announced that I was a

rumbero. Many of the older Havana based *rumberos* wore all white when they were performing. White clothing and regalia also relates to Afro-Cuban religious obligations. An *iyabó,* or new initiate in the Santeriá spiritual tradition, must dress entirely in white for one year (Brown 2005). Being new to the field, I felt I needed to purposefully curate my clothing when entering rumba spaces.

I immediately noticed four brown skinned men talking in a corner next to the main bar. The men took up an unusually large amount of space even though they were in a corner. Two of the men stood facing the door with legs apart. They looked like they were about to draw six shooters from holsters hidden underneath their white sport jackets. The man that was talking clinched his bottle tightly. He shook it around when he spoke. His movements almost looked choreographed. Each of the four men had sloping, flat brimmed, *kangol* style hats. The *kangol* style hat is a style commonly worn by *rumberos* and Cuban musicians in general. The man with the glass in his hand was tall, skinny, and had shiny face that reflected the club's lights.

I had interviewed enough *rumberos* in Cuba to understand that full-bodied conversation was just as much part of the rumba as the performances on the stage. When he grabbed at his crotch, which he did often, he furrowed his brow. He constantly broke eye contact with the group to admire women passing by. I consciously relaxed my body. I introduced myself to the group of *rumberos*. I explained that I was interested in learning more about the culture of *rumberos*. Before I could finish my partially memorized research spiel, they asked where I was from. “California,” I said. I am originally from San Jose, but a lot of Cubans mistake the Silicon Valley’s San Jose for the capital of

Costa Rica. The tall lanky man responded quickly, "*Somos Cubanos"* (We're Cuban). He leaned back with a relaxed, smug look. His response oozed with pride.

Without asking, he gave me a rudimentary history lesson on the history of the rumba. I was slightly offended by his forceful hand patting on my back. He explained how the rumba was an art form that every Cuban understood. His constant reference to the rumba's relationship to Cubans, regardless of race, color, class, or country of residence, led me to believe that the simple fact of being Cuban related to authenticity in New York City rumba communities. Through the course of the night, meeting non-Cubans searching for "real" Cuban dancers and musicians validated my suspicions about markers of authenticity.

The group of four asked *why* and *how* I became interested in the rumba. The exchange felt like an interview. My responses were repeatedly cut short. The shortest man of the group asked if I was an initiate of "*la religion"* (a term commonly in Havana and New York City to signify Santería). While I was giving the long explanation of my respect for Santería, Pedrito walked on the stage with two other musicians. Our conversation came to an abrupt end as the action turned to the stage.

The three musicians on stage sat down in a row of three chairs. I later learned that one of the musicians was Roman Diaz, a renowned percussionist of congas and the *batá* drums. The three male musicians delicately placed the drums on their laps. Pedrito positioned himself with a purposeful awareness that was mesmerizing to watch. They became still. The audience also became still. Pedrito yelled "*Kawo Kabiyesi*", which means "hail, His Majesty" (David Stanly, personal communication to the author, May 5,

2011). Pedrito was asking for Shango's blessing. David, the videographer at New York's El Fogon and a *babalawo* (Santería priest), later explained that Shango is "the owner of the drum, all the beauty in being a strong man, a lover, a warrior, passionate, a man that can make love the *right* way to a woman. That's Shango and the children of Shango" (David Stanly, personal communication to the author, May 5, 2011). Pedrito, like many other *rumberos*, channeled Santería's wealth of knowledge to intensify performances. The trio started their set with traditional Santería songs of worship. Following religious protocol, the group started off with a homage to Eleggua, the *orisha* that represents the beginning and end of life (David Stanly, personal communication to the author, May 5, 2011).

Pedrito's knowledge of the *batá* drums, continually references Shango, the "owner of the drums," the warrior, the epitome of male heterosexual masculinity, was an important factor related to Pedrito's performance authenticity amongst the *rumberos* in the audience. Pedrito's knowledge of synchronized, African expressive cultural retentions**,** reinforced with strong masculine undertones were related to authenticity in rumba spaces (Moore 1997, 2006; Ortiz 1996; Sublette ibid). Moving further to the intersectional aspects of these performances, it was also a translation of "blackness." What was once disavowed in pre-Revolutionary Cuba was an object of splendor on the stage. What was once described as unrefined by White Cubans in power was now a central aspect of Cuban identity (Moore 1997). The believed fixity of blackness, only improved by racial mixture, was actually fluid (Daniel 1995, Fernandes ibid, Sawyer ibid, Jackson 2001, 2010). I furiously wrote down notes about events on and off the stage.

THEORIZING THE PERFORMANCE

My reading of Pedrito's performances of authenticity is supported by the work of theorist E. Patrick Johnson (2003). Johnson's work in *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* helps me theorize the socio-political implications of Pedrito's performance on and off the stage. Pedrito's dark brown body, his mastery of Afro-Cuban music forms, and his deep knowledge of Afro-Cuban spiritual tradition were all related to male, masculine, authenticity in the New York City rumba community. Johnson views the essentialized, racialized subject as a "lived, embodied experience" and "blackness" as a performance that is in the constant process of becoming realized. Instead of a singular "authentic" performance of blackness, Johnson persuasively argues that the mixture of attributes can be "altered, expanded, reduced, or diluted" (Johnson 2003). Pedrito's ancestors experienced injustices in part because of economic greed, global capitalism, racism, and were targeted for this exploitation based partly on their phenotypes. Pedrito used his body, what Johnson calls the "pot," to entertain the multi-ethnic and multi-national audience at SOB's.

Pedrito's performance was a display of African diaspora transnational citizenship. He constantly announced his relationships to space on the local, national, and international levels. Pedrito exclaimed that he was from Cayo Hueso, Havana. Audience members that knew Havana neighborhoods would have understood this reference. Among Cuban musicians, Cayo Hueso is known as a community that produces *rumberos* (Ralph, personal communication to the author, February 2, 2012). Pedrito then thanked his New York City audience for welcoming him in their city. I contend that Pedrito

referenced his transnational travels to demonstrate his professional development as a *rumbero*. Legendary Cuban musicians like Arsenio Rodríguez and Chano Pozo immigrated to New York to irrevocably transform New York City's musical landscape (Jottar 2011). Starting from street performers in Havana to international acclaim in New York City is a sign of "arrival" for professional Cuban artists (Lucumí, personal communication to the author, February 10, 2012). It is no coincidence that accomplished *rumberos* like Pedrito and Lucumí defined artistic success as playing concerts in New York City, a hub of African diaspora artistic cultural production.

Pedrito's *roots* in Havana and *routes* to New York City are part of the heritage of artists and scholars that forged diasporic identities through transnational travel. W.E.B. Dubois's scholarship on Africa and its diaspora creates an ideological grounding of the roots of disparate peoples of African descent (Gilroy 2000). *Roots* are a common ancestry that is a connecting force of different African descendant communities. The *roots* theory is complimented by a *routes* conception of the African diaspora. Dubois's physical travels to continental Africa helped provide an example of routes, the movement of people that create multiple points or origins or multiple "homes."

Dubois's alliances with heads of state like Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah helped forge the political *routes* of Pan-Africanism. The most contemporary form of transnational communication pertinent to this study is the Rumba in NYC Facebook group. The fact that more people viewed Pedrito's performance online than live is a testament that *virtual routes* are the new routes that facilitate diasporic identities in the *rumba nueva*.

Pedrito understood how live music publicized by Internet social media could further his career. He understood the juxtaposition of performance traditions shared globally with technology. Pedrito's weekly gig at Guantanamera's was an immensely popular location for Cuban musicians and dancers alike. Another aspect of New York City authenticity in the rumba community is a strong online presence. There are dozens of recorded performance videos of Pedrito on YouTube. In 2009, he worked with Roman Diaz to create *The Routes of Rumba* compact disc. Not only was this disc an innovative work on rumba and Afro-Cuban religious rhythms, it also had interactive material that could be played on computers with CD-ROM drives. The marriage of audio-visual media uploads to websites able to host videos (primarily YouTube, Facebook, and Vimeo) were part of the cultural fabric of New York City rumbas.

Transnational movement of bodies and ideas in the New York City *rumba nueva* is part of historic legacies. Gilroy documents how ships traveling between the Americas, Europe, and Africa transferred political thought, books, pamphlets, records, and scholarly articles (Gilroy 1993). The exchange of rumba records in New York occurred beginning in the 1950 (Jottar 2011). Sharing of rumba records in New York from Cuba and Cuban musicians living in New York was that generation's way of using technology to build cultural bridges. Interlocutors explained that significant routes to New York City were immigration following 1959 Revolution, the 1980 Mariel Boatlift, and the years during and following the Special Period.

I argue that touch is an important response to disembodiment of media viewing and social media viewership. Pockets of space became smaller as Pedrito's set

progressed. As open space disappeared, the sensation of touch became a noticeable factor. The crowd fell into the clave sound when the group played the partnered *guaguanco* style of the rumba. The group of *rumberos* I first met in the corner was closely huddled together. The men bounced off of each other with each crack of the clave sticks.

There were groups of women with colorful spandex and high heel shoes. They wiggled with delight as their hips moved in tighter and tighter concentric circles. Their hips moved in one direction while their shoulders went in the opposite direction. Audience members near the stage belted the chorus while Pedrito sang the main stanzas. People that knew the songs' lyrics danced in joyous ecstasy. The speed of the music increased while people's spatial awareness decreased.

Sweaty, tightly packed bodies began rubbing and pulsating against my rigid body. I understood the dance technique, but lacked the characteristic looseness of *rumberos* that experienced the rumba beyond formal technique. When I allowed myself to participant more fully, I felt a strong connected feeling with the other dancers there. As Pedrito's music slowed down, I was able chat informally with others on the dance floor. Using simple questions to start conversations with others, I commented that I was glad I came even though the entrance fee was twenty dollars.

New York City made me acutely aware of my finances. An older Cuban woman that I danced *guaguanco* with earlier said the price was worth it since it was in a clean Manhattan club. She said it was impossible to fit her rowdy friends inside the small Bronx apartment she shared with her family.

Her response spoke to larger issues in New York City's *rumba nueva.* Venturing outside of the apartment to connect with other *rumberos* was a theme in New York City rumbas. Each location had its specific characteristic that attracted or repealed *rumberos*. SOB's was spacious but it had a relatively high cost for admission. In Central Park during the summers, the heat, lack of seating, and inconvenience of the commute from the outer boroughs made it inconvenient for some *rumberos*. Similarly, traveling to El Fogon from Brooklyn could take more than an hour using the subway. Despite the difficulty, *rumberos* arrived. To have that feeling of touch induced through live drums was difficult if not impossible to replicate by viewing the rumba on video hosting websites.

Watching Pedrito on the stage was only half of the performance narratives. Audience interactions to his performances helped me understand gendered performances and cracks in performances of masculinity. Gender dynamics are more complicated than a simple observation of a macho male taking ownership of an objectified female body. In the heights of ecstatic singing, men transgressed spatial boundaries that were common for males in rumba spaces. Their masculine behavior relaxed, allowing them to move physically closer than they normally would in social situations outside of the rumba. Men moved in deep shoulder to shoulder side embraces. With females, *rumberos* danced the basic steps of the *guaguanco.* This was a prominent way masculine roles shifted during the climax of rumba songs.

When the drummers starting playing faster and Pedrito repeated the chorus often, men who knew the songs' lyrics joined in the chorus. To teach other *rumberos* the lyrics of the songs, some *rumberos* sang face to face to help the other *rumbero* read lips or hear

his voice. Sometimes, their mouths were only inches apart. *Rumberos* that acted aloof before made a small wave of loosely connected male bodies. These are significant to the New York City rumbas because there is a gender imbalance with women being in the minority. Men did not dance the partnered *guaguanco* style together, but they did dance together in the same proximity without the sexual poses that are foundational to the *guaguanco* style. Live performances created spaces where certain spatial gender norms were temporarily transgressed.

The culmination of Pedrito's intersectional performances is why many New York City musicians considered him one of the best Afro-Cuban percussionists in the City (Rother 2013). His strong, masculine presence rooted in spiritual practices, strong masculinity, a web presence that made him easy to find through search engines, mastery of the rumba complex, and transnational traveling was a model for authenticity in New York City. However, Pedrito Martinez's brand of authenticity was not the only paradigm of authenticity for the New York City *rumbero*. There were some *rumberos* that learned and practice the rumba differently.

There were other key interlocutors that helped with strengthening my analysis for this research. Although there were countless others I spoke with formally and informally, the interlocutors listed below illuminated the national, ethnic, economic fault lines and alliances within the rumba. Pupy, Chino, and Congo were influential *rumberos* in the scene that helped me look at contrasting ideas of artistic ownership, identity's relation to space, and diaspora in New York City rumbas. Other *rumberos* and scholars that were helpful were: Tito, Bertha, Lisa Knauer, Diana, Yesenia, La Mora, Stevie Insua, Freddie,

Pete Conga Jr., Umberto Brown, and countless rumba dance students and family members of *rumberos*. Participant observation and participant performance was one of the best ways to gather the viewpoints of these and other interlocutors in New York City.

THEORIZATION OF DANCE AND PERFORMANCE FROM INTERLOCUTORS' PERSPECTIVES

Pupy was one of the first *rumberos* I met when I visited New York City. Before leaving Havana, Pupy had worked with respected Cuban groups Raices Profundas and Yoruba Andabo. When he moved to New York in 1995, he became a rich artistic and religious resource for *rumberos* already living there. I helped stock drinks at El Fogon's makeshift bar so I could be near when he taught his classes. I learned how to operate the sound system at El Fogon so I could be useful if he had problems with sound during his performances. I made myself an asset to him because he was such a valuable resource.

Some people physically moved away from his domineering personality when he talked about Afro-Cuban history. I moved closer to display my attentiveness. His analysis helped me think through Afro-Latinidad theory. He pushed me to think deeply about physical and virtual rumbas. He critiqued my vocabulary when I lazily referred to participants simply by their skin color. He believed an anthropologist should have a more nuanced vocabulary for race, understanding that racial classifications changed depending on space, even within New York City. He had one of the most sophisticated embodied understandings of African retentions in Afro-Cuban culture in New York City. His

mentorship and tacit approval provided the social capital I needed to gain the trust of other New York City *rumberos*.

Pupy helped forge diasporic identities through the performance of rumba. Pupy did this by using the diversity of movement in the rumba as a metaphor for the heterogeneity of the African diaspora. He demonstrated dance movements from Yoruba, Congo, Carabalí, Arará, abakuá and even enslaved Haitians that were forcibly brought to the Eastern part of the Island during the Haitian Revolution in the late 1700s and early 1800s. His dance movements were also peppered with grandiose flamenco movements of *Spanish Roma* or *gitano,* which translates to gypsy in English. Pupy's version of dance movements signified a belief in homogeneous ethnic groups that formed a new, culture.

Pupy expected skilled dancers to understand the small performance nuances of the different dances. Although there was an essentializing effect to his belief of Spanish and different ethnic groups, Pupy's embodied theory of Cuban hybridization influenced other *rumberos*' views on race and specific African ethnicities forcibly brought to Cuba. His analysis of the African diaspora through a deconstruction of movement genealogies, based on specific African ethnic groups, distinguished his process of teaching. His fast paced classes helped instill a sense of history and story-telling in the dance.

Chino and Congo taught me more about the racial understandings and performance in the rumba. These men were usually the song leaders of rumbas at Central Park and had a large role in maintaining the flow of rumbas at El Fogon. They provided technical explanations of what they were doing and why they were doing it. Chino was the smooth Venezuelan crooner that always seemed to have a drink in his hand while he

effortlessly cycled through a broad archive of rumba songs. He represented the people that were not Cuban, but could pass as Cuban with their mannerisms, skin tone, and familiarity with the rumba.

Chino problematized the idea of *rumberos* being archetypes of black hyper-masculinity. He had a low-key, welcoming personality that invited conversation. By conversation I mean a two-way interaction. With other *rumberos*, Pupy included, conversations could easily turn into monologues. Chino was a *rumbero* who had connections to different New York City rumba locations. His responses demonstrated the notion of a cultural African diaspora in the New York City rumba by his cross-ethnic, cross-national alliances based on respect and genuine friendliness.

Congo was a physically imposing figure that exuded confidence in his knowledge of songs. Congo was not the strongest singer, did not have the largest vocal range, and may not have been the best improviser. His calm personality brought a semblance of order to Central Park rumbas. The loud, public conversations on "correct" rumba were Congo's main gift to this research. When a drummer was technically off, Congo would let him know. If the rumba was moving towards a heavy mix of Afro-Diasporic drumming technique instead of recognized rumba patterns, he would let musicians know.

RUMBA SPACES AND SPACES THAT INFORMED THE RUMBA

Analyzing New York City rumba spaces is a helpful way to theorize the relationships between identity and space. There were three important field sites during this project. These were: Central Park, El Fogon, and Esquina Habanera. These spaces

facilitated specific performance practices, identity, and discourses of a diasporic collective. Additionally, *rumberos* performed in predominately Latino communities. The Lower East Side, Spanish Harlem, and the Bronx were places where most informal rumbas were held.

CENTRAL PARK RUMBA SPACE, OWNERSHIP, AND FAULT LINES

Drummers have been congregating in Central Park to play the rumba for decades. Lawn chairs mark the inclined hill facing the lake with slow moving canoes. Blankets keep families off hard grass that feels like it has teeth. There were strong familial relationships within the rumba. I maintain that the *rumba nueva* is fundamentally a communal gathering connected through music. Children ran across the grassy hill as their parents shared stories over refreshments. Family pets found shade under the broad canopy of clover shaped leaves. Pedestrians haphazardly passed by and discovered a hidden world in the shadows of the Bow Bridge. Tourists stood with amazement, watching virtuosic musicianship at its finest.

The Central Park rumbas had long stretches of time without music. Some days I would just sit on the grass to listen to informal lessons the men gave inexperienced drummers. Other days, the songs melted into each other with a slow, climactic explosion that receded with a crisp snap. When the fast songs were played, *rumberos* physically pushed the crowd back to make a large circle. Men of all types of sizes posed in statuesque poses to the rhythm of the music. Cameras and video recording equipment formed audiences outside of the rumba community are constant fixtures in *rumba nueva.*

For most of its history, the rumba in NYC, specifically in Central Park, was a predominantly Puerto Rican practice (Jottar 2011). Peter Manuel analyzes how Puerto Rican borrowings, synthesis, and creative appropriation of Cuban music resulted in its transformation and/or resignification (Manuel 1994). Manuel further argues that Puerto Rican and Nuyorican cultivation and practice of Cuban musical forms have re-signified Cuban music into Puerto Rican-identified practices or pan-Latino enunciations. For instance, the performance of the *guaguancó* style became the dominant genre in New York City's drum circles, as well as the symbol of Puerto Rican, Nuyorican, and pan-Latino solidarity (Manuel 1994, 267). In this context, rumba functioned as an art form in the 1960s and 1970s that Puerto Ricans used to express, mediate, and constitute their identities (Manuel 1994, 267).

Bertha Jottar's study of Puerto Rican identity in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s describes the multi-national experiences of the rumba community in Central Park (Jottar 2011). Older Cuban and Puerto Rican men who established regular rumbas in Central Park over 30 years ago were giving way to a multi-ethnic group of native New York musicians. Without title or connections to Cuba, I soon learned that this younger generation (20-35) was changing the composition of rumbas from a Cuban expatriate / Puerto Rican phenomenon to a pan-Caribbean, pan-African diaspora cultural practice.

The Central Park rumba could also be a volatile space because of the divergent views on how the rumba should be played and by whom. Naturally, Puerto Rican Americans that never trained in Cuba drummed differently than *rumberos* from Havana. According to Pete Conga Jr., many Puerto Rican *rumberos* had backgrounds in *plena*,

bomba, and of course, *salsa*. I enjoyed the artistic experimentation that took place in Central Park. *Rumbero* purists that took their inspiration from Havana and Matanzas drumming masters viewed this “inventing” as a travesty to the rich tradition of the rumba.

The dynamic of the Central Park rumba shifted when darker skinned Cubans from the Mariel Boatlift arrived in New York City (Jottar 2011). One of the most common Central Park phrases I recorded was “*no es la rumba.*” Remembering specific instances of the phrase is difficult because it was used so often. When Puerto Rican women swiveled their hips in a salsa motion, I heard mumbles of “*no es la rumba*” from the older men. The Central Park rumbas were so unpredictable because the “*no es la rumba*” mentality stopped songs when a musician was not playing the rhythms correctly. Older, Cuban *rumberos* would punish creative flourishes that strayed too far from accepted rumba styles. A salsa flourish, *bomba*, or hip-hop rhythm would be punished through public, paternal lessons. Moments of verbal and physical violence sometimes erupted when *rumberos* disagreed on how the rumba should be performed.

It was a Sunday in summer of 2012 that began like most others. The crowd’s emotions were high as skilled drummers worked the dancers to a frenzy. While dancing, I saw a *rumbero* that I had not seen before. I do not know how he gained a position with the drummers because his rhythm was badly off. *Rumberos* shook their heads in displays of exaggerated disgust. A few of the spectators sitting on the grass massaged their ears to signal how bad they felt the drumming sounded. If I had not spent hours listening to skilled *rumberos*, I would have thought that he was performing a solo. Congo asked him to move away from the drums so a more experienced *rumbero* could play. The man

staggered, clearly inebriated. After he stood up, he looked dejectedly at the pond directly in front of the line of drums.

Standing around, he kidnapped anyone's ear that made the mistake of making eye contact with him. His name, which I later found was Art, tapped his finger on his light brown skin proclaiming the blood of Africans flowed through his veins. Art lacked the Cuban ancestry that some NYC *rumberos* believed gave them ownership of the rumba. In muffled tones, he talked about the African roots of Puerto Rican salsa music. He gasped out the word, *plena*. *Plena* is a Spanish and African influenced genre of music created in Puerto Rico. Art proclaimed that the *bomba* (Afro-Puerto Rican music style) is the "rumba" of Puerto Rico. I listened more closely because of my interest in Afro-Puerto Rican culture.

Congo could have let Art continue to talk. But as an alpha male at many of the Central Park rumbas, he had to bring his version of order into the space. Congo gave a toothy grin and said there were no Puerto Ricans that had dark, mahogany skin like his. Art seemed upset. He spoke louder. His confident smirk eased during the loud exchange. Art spit, yelled, and gave a vocal tirade that his ancestry was also black. He believed that a bloodline could connect him to other *rumberos*. Congo grabbed him by the collar and waved his hand in front of Art's swerving eyes. Art staggered and seemed to forget the conversation altogether. He was undeterred in his belief that his Nuyorican roots connected him to the roots of the rumba. He kept yelling until his friend finally led him away.

Art's longing to connect with Africa, to form a lineage to a mythic Africa shows how New York City *rumberos* actively generated connections to the African heritages and the African diaspora in general. The longing to connect with other people of African descent was not welcomed by some gatekeepers who had knowledge of technique closer to the Cuban original.

The racial connotations to Congo's and Art's exchange were significant. I learned about the Taino Movement through Austin's Puerto Rican Folkloric Group. The movement reinterpreted Puerto Rico's history to center indigenous Taino life-ways as a core aspect of Puerto Rican identity. When I taught salsa dancing at West Bronx High School in the Bronx, many Puerto Rican students said their *moreno* (dark) skin was a legacy of their Taino roots. The indigenous roots belief system in some Hispanic Caribbean communities worked as an act to conceal possible African ancestry (Candelario 2007; Flores 2000; Wucker 1999).

Norka spoke about this. She was the director of El Fogon and a female Puerto Rican drummer versed in both Puerto Rican and Cuban rhythms. She explained that a woman told her that people associated with the Taino Movement did not have curly, kinky hair. Norka's thick, coarse hair clearly showed Sub-Saharan African ancestry. Art was using the rumba and Puerto Rican music to pay homage to possible African ancestry. In New York City, where many people of African descent see "black" and "Latino" as mutually exclusive, Art conceived of a different reality.

The conversations between Cubans and non-Cubans were not always so volatile. On the contrary, non-Cubans played critical roles in the Central Park rumbas. Tito was a

New York Dominican that played rumba in Central Park since the late 1970s. He was one of the few *rumberos* in New York City who knew how to dance both the *columbia* and *guaguanco* styles. Freddy, another non-Cuban, was one of Pupy's most dedicated students that even danced in Pupy's group, Oriki Omi Oddara. Multi-generational, multi-national, and multi-ethnic collaboration brought different perspectives to the rumba.

Tourists and novice *rumberos* sometimes helped build a stronger cohesion in the Central Park rumba. They helped feed rumberos' egos. Actor Matt Dillon was a regular at rumbas around New York City. On a cool August afternoon in the summer of 2012, Matt made a detour from his Central Park jog to visit some of his old *rumbero* acquaintances he knew from Esquina Habanera. Tito asked him to try his hand at playing *guaguanco*. Matt's many mistakes were applauded by the growing crowd. When Congo arrived, Matt understood that his informal lessons were over. Congo's arrival signified that lessons, for the *aficionados* (beginners) would resume in the calm between rumba songs.

Talking with Matt after his performance, he mentioned that the rumba was something "raw" that he wanted to be part of. Passionate exchanges and mutual learning was the norm at the Central Park rumbas. All the same, there was a constant tension between different viewpoints of the rumba based on ethnic, national, and artistic identities.

TEACHING AFRICAN DIASPORA AT EL FOGON CENTER OF THE ARTS

Pupy's energy transformed a former bodega into one of the centers of the NYC rumba community. Pupy wanted to bring the *orisha, Shango* and a deep understanding of

Afro-Cuban traditions to New York City (Jennifer, personal communication to the author, December 4, 2011). El Fogon's Friday rumbas had a multi-ethnic musicianship facilitated by Pupy. He had the personality to keep egos in check while giving the musicians artistic space to enhance their skills.

I enjoyed El Fogon because of the wordplay that helped develop a collective African diasporic character. For example, the word *isla* (island) could refer to the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Puerto Rico, or other Caribbean islands. It was a clever way to acknowledge the places of origin or ancestral homes of *rumberos*. *Rumberos* used the word *barrio* (neighborhood) interchangeably as a general term for neighborhood or the specific East Harlem Puerto Rican neighborhood commonly called *El Barrio*. The communities that left their homes in the Caribbean and Latin America could resonate with lyrics such as these.

The quality sound system at El Fogon allowed for clear understanding of their word choices. *Rumberos* also used the term *moreno* or the phrase *"somos morenos"* in conversations and improvisational endings of songs. In New York City, the word had different meanings based on context. Based on the speaker, the location where the word was said, and the nationality of the speaker, *moreno* could mean African-American, black skinned people regardless of nationality, light brown skinned people, or darker skinned people. *Somos morenos* can mean we are brown skinned people, darker people, or black people. Since the majority of the population had a shade of brown skin, using this phrased helped participants feel that they were part of a larger African diaspora community.

To the Dominican family I lived with in Washington Heights and the Puerto Rican teenagers I taught in the West Bronx, *moreno* was a term that meant “racial other.” To my Dominican housemates, *morenos* were the African-Americans that lived in Harlem. For the Puerto Rican teenagers, they were the West Indian and Dominican students that sometimes had darker skin tones. *Rumberos*’ verbal affirmation of “*somos morenos”* was a refutation of negative notions of black identity or black ancestry that was common in New York City Latino communities.

Location and place was an important aspect of creating feelings of connectivity through African diasporic artistic expressions. The 35 minutes it took to travel from lower Manhattan to El Fogon was a significant journey for people who believed that they had no reason to leave their island. Two of Pupy’s African-American female students that went to his Manhattan classes at the Alvin Ailey Extension had a lasting effect on me.

On a slow Friday night in May of 2011, these two students were the first to arrive. Pupy was about 30 minutes late. I was busy was stocking the bar. The nervousness of the women was palpable. I stopped what I was doing to introduce myself. Donna, the older woman, exclaimed, “We’re Manhattan girls, we never really come to the Bronx”. They asked me if their safety was in question in the central Bronx neighborhood of Mott Haven. Before I could answer, Donna commented on the “weird buildings” that surrounded us. The makeshift structures she referred to were two-story brick duplexes that boasted more space than many downtown Manhattan apartments. For some, going to El Fogon, or even the Bronx, was an experience marked with race and class differences.

When Pupy spoke to the audiences at the El Fogon rumbas, he referenced the location as a place where Cubans, Puerto Ricans, African-Americans, Afro-Latinos, Afro-Puerto Ricans, and the African diaspora could convene in fellowship. The building and surrounding area was *their* space to create alternative realities. In the predominately Latino and African-American neighborhood of Mott Haven, Bronx, *rumberos* and people coming to visit the rumba experienced a mingling of diverse identities and nationalities fashioning a vision of a multi-ethnic African diaspora.

LA ESQUINA HABANERA

One of the best-known Cuban music venues in the New York City area was La Esquina Habanera. Located in Union City, a few miles west of New York City, this venue was famous due to the music and dance ensemble, Raices Habanera. Created by David Oquendo, the group included Roman Diaz (percussionist), Pedrito Martinez (percussionist), Pupy Insua (percussionist), Gene Golden (percussionist), Jose Real "Chino" (singer), and Xiomara Rodríguez (dancer) among others. Sadly, after years of complaints and previously closing, Esquina Habanera finally closed its doors in 2011. Accordingly, my ethnographic data is limited. While it was open, some *rumberos* did not attend because New Jersey's transit system could be cumbersome. Furthermore, there were many *rumberos* that baulked at the $5.00 entrance fee. Once Esquina Habanera closed its doors for good, *rumberos* migrated to other New York City rumbas.

TRANSIENT SPACES

There were also transient spaces that *rumberos* used occasionally or where rumba workshops were held. The Brecht Forum took the place of the Central Park rumbas during the winter months. La Mora held Afro-Cuban folkloric parties and occasional dance socials at the Alvin Ailey Extension in Manhattan. There were cultural nights at the Bronx Museum Cuban, Rumbas in the New York City's Lower East Side, and informal drumming in Spanish Harlem. Additionally, workshops by Los Muñequitos de Matanzas, Ballet Cutumba, and Havana born dancer/choreographer, Maykel Fonts, were held in dance studios around New York City. Irregular spaces of the rumba provided immense information on technique, transnational beliefs on identity, and the different meanings of authenticity.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSES TO RUMBA SPACES

The previous chapter described the Cuban government's influences and support of the rumba. This sponsorship increased the visibility of rumbas in Cuba and abroad. Government and *rumbero* relations were different in New York City. *Rumberos'* immigration status, color, ethnicity, and language abilities intersected in pervasive police surveillance at the Central Park rumbas. Those realities included the continual confrontations between law enforcement officials and *rumberos* in New York's Central Park.

The clashes begin in the 1990s and even into the 2012s when *rumberos* and officials disagreed on the meaning of "public nuisance". The political mobilization that

occurred in the Central Park rumbas is part of a larger history of political action within the African diaspora. The scholarly work of Jottar reviews the lineage of police intervention as a legacy of surveillance of people of African descent during the Cuban colonial period (Jottar 2009). Specifically, her work compares policing of the Afro-Cuban *comparsas* in pre-Revolution Cuba to the policing of *rumberos* in 1990s Central Park. Jottar's study succinctly describes the confrontations throughout the 1990s (Jottar 2009).

The area of aggressive policing during Rudy Giuliani's mayoral term (January 1994 to December 2001) affected the rumba through "nuisance laws" (Jottar 2009). In the 2000s and during the two years I conducted ethnographic research from 2011 to early 2013, I witnessed *rumberos*' fiery anger when uniformed police dispersed the rumbas. Police officers stated that the public alcohol drinking, cigarette smoking, obstruction of the pathway, and excessive litter were the main problems. From the perspectives of interlocutors such as Pete Conga Jr., the police confrontations were part of New York City law enforcement's racist profiling of Latino and African-American men (Pete Conga Jr., personal communication with the author, June 5, 2012). In loud, animated discussions after the police would leave, he would sometimes describe the insults that he and men of color experienced on a daily basis.

The discussions I had with Latino and African-American young men at the West Bronx High School alerted me to the prevalence of the "stop-question-and-frisk" program more commonly called "stop and frisk," in neighborhoods with people of color. The

rumba did not shield *rumberos* from the daily realities of being people of color in New York City.

GENDER AND PLACE IN THE NEW YORK CITY RUMBA

Rumba spaces in New York City had strong gender divisions. Anthropologist Yvonne Daniel argues that rumba is a performed representation of Cuban gender roles and machismo (Daniel 1995). Gender tropes of rumba performances usually connected with leading, protection, and ownership of women (Daniel 1995). I use rumba dance classes as evidence to describe the possible reasons and implications of the gendered divisions that Daniel described in Cuba in the early 1990s.

In the context of dance classes, men played percussive instruments while women comprised most of the dance students. The presence of women in dance classes and their minority status in other rumba locations provided clues on the composition of the *rumba nueva* in New York City. I base this claim on La Mora, Pupy, Stevie, and Yesenia's dance classes. To be sure, the female dynamic of classes was not unique to the rumba. It was common in many West African and African diaspora folkloric dance classes in New York City. To understand why pronounced gender visions continued, I asked male and female *rumberos/as* why the gender dynamic seemed so prevalent. The next section illuminates some of the diverse reasons why the *rumba nueva* celebrates African diasporic identities yet constrains some aspects of female participation.

Similar to race, gender is socially constructed and is an ongoing process of performance (Delgado, Fraser, Munoz, 1997; Gottschild 2005; Jackson 2001; Jones

1996; Putnam 2001). Instead of being rooted in biology, subjects' gender performances were an ongoing negotiation between performer and audience. Male *rumberos* sometimes transgressed Cuban and US gender norms to intensify a sense of shared community. Nevertheless, performances of masculine strength related to a streetwise "authentic" *rumbero* in New York City. Alexander (1997; 2005) examined how performances of black masculinity might be used to circumscribe expressions of black female subjectivity. Alexander helps me synthesize how some of the *rumbero's* masculine performance practices might unwittingly (or wittingly) censor female participation in rumbas.

Female *rumberas* in New York City worked within and against gender hierarchies in the rumba. If they hoped to participate fully, they would occasionally need to withstand macho, domineering behavior from some male *rumberos* that believed they were the sole conservators of the rumba in New York City. El Fogon was unique compared to Central Park because of the female participation. Yomaira and Jadele sang backup and lead vocals at rumbas facilitated by Pupy. Yessenia took rumba from the dank, male only basements to Manhattan nightclub lounges. Yessenia even created her own workshops that included all female drummers. In addition, she took great care in teaching female dance movements.

The *rumba nueva* had a small, core group of female supporters with advanced degrees. Berta, Lisa, and Diana were interlocutors that provided perspectives that included race, class and gender. Mexican born Berta Jottar collaborated with Pedrito Martinez and Roman Diaz to create a conceptual rumba music CD. She was also the creator of the Rumba in NYC Facebook group that I used as one of my primary field

sites. She is still an important contributor to the website even though there are others that have taken the lead in initiating discussions on the group's message board.

There were other women that often visited rumba spaces to dance. Berta added one of Pupy's longtime students, Cathy Moore, as a co-moderator for the Rumba in NYC group. Lisa Knauer, an anthropologist that has written foundational articles that helped the conceptualization of this dissertation (2009a, 2009b), was a regular participant. Diana, a NYU dance education professor, was a student of Pupy when he was still establishing himself as a teacher in New York. The fierce determination to dance in spaces where few women ventured was extremely helpful in assessing who was able to break rumba gender norms. Dancing and singing on the stage with *rumberos* did not mean they could enter circles where small groups of men practiced drumming technique outside of public rumbas. Their roles as researchers, long-time participants, women, or non-black bodies provided different levels of access for these women.

LOS MUÑEQUITOS DE MATANZAS COMMUNITY DANCE CLASS[9]

Strong gendered divisions continued even when the Los Muñequitos and Cutumba came to perform in New York City. I could hear the drums two blocks away from the Lutheran Church that was going to be our makeshift studio. The roar of the drums seemed out of place in the quiet, tree lined streets of the Orthodox Jewish neighborhood. The energy was palpable when I opened the heavy wooden door to the church. Drumming students sat attentively near professional looking congas. Dancers

9 Participant observation of the Los Muñequitos de Matanzas Community Dance Class, May 6 2011, 12:00pm-4:00pm, 178 Bennett Avenue at 189th St, New York.

rolled on the ground in complicated, callisthenic stretches. White bandanas and flowing skirts lightly swept the floor as they moved. The two hour long workshop was a simultaneous drum and dance class. The dance portion was made up of about 30 females and nine males. The drumming portion of the class was made of mostly male percussionists with a sprinkling of female drummers.

Max Pollack, the creator of "rumba tap," a style of rumba mixed with body percussion and tap dance, was the translator for the workshop. Male and female dancers were separated into groups based on gender. The female group had a larger space in the hall due to their greater numbers. Males had a comparably smaller area closer to the drummers. The dance portion of the workshop started with learning basic rhythms of *yambú* and *guaguanco.* The dance instructor from the Muñequitos, Badáro, taught the women a series of semi-complicated dance phrases. The female dance phrases became progressively harder. Male students did not receive the same variety of dance movements to rehearse. The males learned some basic *columbia* steps while female students learned elaborate choreographies that required intense body isolations.

Women howled with delight as Badáro challenged them with choreographies conveyed humorous narratives of desire. My jealousy rose as I, part of the male group, repeated simple side-to-side steps. Badáro's attention to the female dancers, lackluster interest in male dancers, and other Muñequito instructors focus on the male dominated percussion section reinforced gender norms that were common in New York City rumba spaces and classes.

Female dancers, male percussionists, and mixed gender singing were the norm at Esquina Habanera, Central Park, and El Fogon. I asked Dawn Drake, a North American percussionist, about her views on the issue of why so few women played rumba rhythms in public. Dawn had played rumbas for Yessenia's classes, Pupy's classes, and in informal rumbas in Brooklyn, She said there were no Afro-Cuban religious prohibitions on female drummers since rumba is a secular art form. Dawn explained in frank terms that it was because the men became too "fresh" at the rumbas. She explained that being pushed around by men with questionable technique in dancing was not her idea of an enjoyable experience. In Cuba, she said, men rarely touched women when they danced the *guaguanco* style of the rumba. If they did touch women, it was to dance in a slow, sensual *son* dance that is like a slower, less ostentatious version of today's salsa dance. In New York City she replied, some *rumberos* use close embraces without properly following the rhythm. She explained that some New York City *rumberos* dance a strange mix of rumba and club grinding. I stopped dancing in circles so I could analyze the interactions similar to what Dawn talked about.

After the interview with Dawn, I talked to a junior scholar who studied Afro-Cuban dance in Cuba. She had grown up in New York City and knew many of the leading Cuban dancers in New York City. She corroborated Dawn's statements about objectifying actions that made some women feel uncomfortable. At rumbas, I observed women dance in closed circles, facing each other. Men they were unfamiliar with were excluded from this circle. The tactic prevented men from dancing *guaguanco* with them because the dance is usually danced side by side or less commonly, face to face.

If a man could not make eye contact with a potential female dance partner, she was neither accepting nor denying his advances. Friendships and alliances were maintained without offending a male *rumbero's* pride. The subtle gendered aggression related to partner dancing was a contributing factor to the reasons why female participation in rumbas was limited in New York City.

THE DEATH OF PUPY

Even though the *rumba nueva* is ongoing, I mark Pupy's death as a change in the way the rumba was practiced in New York City. I use his death as a marker that signals the close of this research project. In many ways, the popularity of the rumba in New York City was connected to Pupy's larger than life persona. His dancing with Raices Habaneras and collaborations with Roman Diaz and Pedrito Martinez were components that contributed to the popularity of the rumba in New York City. Pupy was happy to share Afro-Cuban religious and secular aspects of Cuban arts with anyone willing to study.

From the time he was in New York City (1995 until shortly before his death in 2011), Pupy shared secular and religious aspects of Afro-Cuban culture with a broad demographic of New Yorkers. Pupy was unparalleled in his use of Afro-Cuban art forms to show ways the African diaspora in Cuba looked, sounded, and felt. Pupy's form of teaching was similar to the the objectives of the Black Arts Movement. Black Arts Movement artists proposed a separate "symbolism, mythology, and iconography" that affirmed the realities of black people (Neal 1968). Writer and scholar Larry Neal

advocated for an artistic movement that advocated for self-determination. Artists sought to “purify” old arts and create new symbols that shaped culture (Neal 1968). Pupy utilized art to display the complicated, interconnected history of people of African descent in the Caribbean, Africa, and Cuba. He explained the multiple histories of Cubans of African descent by looking at migratory flows within Latin America and Caribbean African Diasporas. When he did this, he showed the diversity and beauty of a people marked by hundreds of years of institutionalized slavery.

Pupy’s final public rumba was a powerful, gathering of *rumberos* from all over the tri-state area. The Los Muñequitos de Matanzas attended to pay homage to the dying elder. At the memorial after his death, his friends, students, and people in the Santería community contributed to the elaborate alter to Shango at Pupy’s Bronx apartment. Contradicting this, El Fogon’s owners believed that Pupy’s real home was at El Fogon. With the help of David’s religious credentials in Yoruba religious traditions, the owners of El Fogon created their own alter to Pupy that was also blessed by David. This was sign of how competing ideas of ownership and authenticity continued to create divisions within the rumba community. Following Pupy’s death, a new era began.

CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the physical characteristics and socio-cultural implications of the rumba in New York City. This creates a solid foundation to discuss the virtual rumba community in the next chapter. Broadly, this chapter described the changing beliefs in an African diaspora forged by diasporic performances of identity related to

race, gender, authenticity, and nationality. I discussed conflicts stemming in part from beliefs in a nationalistic Cuban ownership that contrasted the understanding of the rumba as a transnational African diasporic practice. By discussing the rumba’s *roots*, *routes*, and *spaces*, I illuminated the fluidity of performances in New York City rumbas. The next chapter discusses Rumba in NYC Facebook group.

Chapter 6 Electronically Mediated Experience of the Rumba Nueva

Social media is a defining characteristic of the *rumba nueva* that became more accessible to Cubans and North Americans in the 2000s. This chapter describes the possibilities and limitations of participating in rumba communities through virtual communication, facilitated by social media, with particular focus on the virtual connections between rumba communities in New York City and Havana. I describe the online community as a "complicated counter public" because its ability to provide space for marginal voices to participate in discussions about the rumba. Even though the Rumba in NYC group provides space for discussions for some on the margins of the community (non-Cubans, non-Puerto Ricans, English only speakers, novice drummers, females), it also privileges people with reliable Internet access. Most *rumberos* living in Havana, regardless of their status in the rumba, lacked reliable Internet access. Furthermore, marginal status in the *rumba* did not mean a member of the Facebook group lacked economic and social capital elsewhere. This chapter examines these complicated issues.

Interviews, ethnography, and cyber-ethnography revealed how unequal Internet access reflected the growing economic divide in post-Special Period Cuba. Generally, Cubans who received remittances from abroad or worked in Cuba's tourist industry had much greater access to the Internet. In New York City, *rumberos* used a Facebook page to (re)present the rumba into a multi-ethnic, multi-national hybrid that was neither entirely Cuban nor purely American. While *rumberos* in New York City sought to show

the vitality of their practice, ambitious *rumberos* in Havana strategically deployed social media as a method to connect with friends and audience members. They united through social media on *Rumba in NYC*, a Facebook group dedicated to maintaining relationships with *rumberos* in New York City and abroad.

EARLY ARCHETYPES AND SOCIAL MEDIA THEORY

This section briefly describes the lineage of African and African diaspora communities' usage of the Internet to make connections. Using this groundwork, the contemporary ways the rumba community uses the Internet and online social media become clearer.

The first website created specifically to create diasporic connections was Naijernette, a Nigerian website. This early 1990s website predated social networking websites such as Facebook and MySpace. This site generated dialogue that rearticulated the difficulties of being an immigrant, black, and Nigerian in the West. Gilroy's (1993) "roots and routes" now move faster than the speed of powerful T1 lines. The diffusion of information and bodies – or "virtual bodies" – travel through virtual spaces when travel by physical means is not economically feasible.

Afro-Latinidad theory draws upon scholarship that evaluates the limits and possibilities of transnational connection and African diaspora formation. Social psychologist Livingston and Markham (2008) found little evidence that the Internet is a primary source of political mobilization. They believed the Internet is not an alternative

mode of political socialization, but a way for young people to strengthen their political understandings.

In the Introduction to *Young Citizens in the Digital Age,* Brian Loader (2007) reviews how young people use the Internet for political engagement. Loader charts the multiple identities related to race, gender, sexuality, and access to technology. Loader believes that young people already involved in political activity are able to enhance their political capabilities. For the cyber sphere to be a viable model for political change, young people need to understand the conventional political process beforehand.

Anna Everett (2009) provides an alternative view, arguing that the Internet is a social medium that connects diverse groups, fosters community, and reproduces African and African diaspora communities. Everett mentions that the Internet is an alternative public space where the issues and negotiations in the "real world" also take place in the cyber sphere. This new electronic public forum gives people of African descent temporary spaces to contest stereotypes, exchange ideas, and conduct business.

The Internet alters the avenues by which people affect social change, bypassing historic civil rights institutions such as the NAACP (Everette 2009). Everette explains how people of African descent have gained unprecedented access to the Internet even though they lack access to other material resources (ibid). Joy James notes that powerful male leaders have dominated African-American socio-political movements (personal communication to author, May 5, 2010). The Internet may be a way to circumvent patriarchal social structures that marginalize minority and female subjects. These new

capacities to circumvent established power hierarchies are significant to up-and-coming *rumberos* that seek a way to work outside of the state system.

THEORIZATION OF A VIRTUAL AFRICAN DIASPORA

Afro-Latinidad theory considers cultural production, identity formation, and representation with Internet social medial as fundamental aspects of diaspora in the digital age. The phenomenon of diaspora-making in the virtual sphere is supported by the work of scholars that investigate how identity shifts on the Internet (Allen 2009; Androutsopoulos 2006; Brinkerhoff 2009; Cohen 1997; Everett 2009; Fordham 2006; Gillian 2006; Horowitz 1971; Karim 2003; Mitra 2001; Oiarzabal 2006; Pink 2007; Tillman 1999; Tsaliki 2003; Watkins 1998). This section provides an explanation of how I theorize media representation from a Latin American and African diaspora perspective.

A virtual diaspora can arise from a defensive experience, socioeconomic factors, or love of a cultural practice (Brinkerhoff 2009). The diaspora in the virtual sphere arises from all of these. Brinkerhoff notes that, "Scholars have not comparatively examined diasporas' use of the Internet to create online communities for exploring their identities and contemplating agendas vis-à-vis the homeland" (2009, 13). This project adds to this body of knowledge by looking at a cultural diaspora with people that have differing beliefs of home. This nuanced look at the diaspora gives me a perspective of the multiple voices that speak on the virtual rumba.

Following Brinkerhoff (2009, 15), I used three types of virtual communities that allowed me to discuss the virtual African diaspora that I encountered in my fieldwork: 1)

virtual communities that are congruent with physical communities, 2) virtual communities that overlap with physical communities, and 3) virtual communities that are distinct from physical communities. The virtual diaspora is a community that overlaps with physical communities in New York and Havana. Within diaspora communities, "members continuously negotiate their hybrid identities through storytelling, promoting consensus on shared understandings…" (Brinkerhoff 2009, 52). This is true of the virtual diaspora as many dissenting views clash on the nature of the rumba.

THE VIRTUAL AFRICAN DIASPORA CENTERED ON THE RUMBA

I first learned about Cuban social media use during a preliminary dissertation research trip to Cuba in 2009. Young artists, not necessarily *rumberos*, told me how they used Facebook and MySpace to communicate to the outside world. I was captivated by the idea that artistic Cubans of African descent were using the Internet to tell their unique stories to the larger world. I had read Cuban studies texts about Afro-Cubans maintaining the "traditions" of their enslaved ancestors. I had seen documentary films on how Afro-Cubans maintained the cultural aesthetics of their ancestors. I rarely read about the innovative ways Cubans of African descent used technology to communicate.

Stories of Afro-Cubans using the latest social media technology to tell their stories challenged the paradigm that they were living symbols of Cuba's agrarian, colonial past. I met some streetwise amateur *rumberos* who related fantastic stories of how they spoke with Miami and New York City *rumberos* through Facebook. They used clandestine Internet connections or gained access through their foreign friends. Armed

with these new insights, the reality of transnational communication through Facebook became a significant part of my dissertation research. I knew Internet technology was an important part of the *rumba nueva.* I sought to discover the implications of the virtual rumba in relation to the socioeconomic realities facing *rumberos* in Havana and NYC.

Cyber-ethnographic Research

I monitored, participated, and tracked membership in Rumba in NYC, an online Facebook group, for two years from early January 2011 to late December 2012. There were already over 550 members in the group in early 2012. Rumba scholar and videographer Berta Jottar created the group in 2010. Jottar initially wanted to maintain relationships with *rumberos* she met during her research travels (Berta Jottar, personal communication with the author, December 6, 2012). She used New York City in the group's name to highlight the multi-generational rumbas that occurred throughout the city.

Most of the members resided or lived in New York City. Over a quarter of the members listed Havana as their "hometown" or "current city." It was difficult to tell exactly how many *rumberos* were currently in Havana because most members hid their "current city" status. Cubans and Puerto Ricans were the dominant ethnic groups represented. I learned that there was a tremendous amount, over a quarter of the membership living in different cities in the United States and a few cities in Europe. The group steadily grew in 2011 and 2012. Despite its growth, the group maintained its Cuban, Nuyorican, and Afro-Caribbean identity.

The Rumba in NYC Facebook group is the latest manifestation of transnational communication between *rumberos* in New York City and Havana. In her article charting rumba cultural influences in New York City, Jottar described a long lineage of influential that changed the musical landscapes of the United States. Jottar stated:

> Indeed, it is in this era that the music sensibility and performance of traditional rumba overwhelms New York City's professional music scene with the arrival of Cuban *rumberos* like Cándido Camero (1946), Luciano "Chano" Pozo (1947), and the legendary Rodríguez family: Arsenio (1950) who, in Cuba, popularized the tumbadora drum in the *septeto conjunto* format, and his brothers Enrique and Raúl. In the 1950s, the *rumberos* invasion continued in New York City's jazz scene with Ramón "Mongo" Santamaría and his friend Armando Peraza (1950), Julito Collazo (1952), Carlos "Patato" Valdés (1954), Franscisco Aguabella (1957), Eugenio "Totíco" Arango (1959), Mario Muñoz Salazar "Papaito" (1960), and the brothers Enrique and Virgilio Martí among others (2011, 22).

Fluctuating United States immigration laws dictated how Cuban *rumberos* visited their families. After the 1959 Revolution, souring diplomatic relations slowed the cultural exchanges between the two nations (Jottar 2011, 10). Cubans and North Americans used other means to communicate.

Rumba in NYC was the virtual hub where *rumberos* with different backgrounds created a common community based on sharing media they had gathered from personal travel, second hand, scholarly sources, or other websites. Uploaded pictures and audiovisual media changed text-heavy background into a rich, flowing, interactive

repository of knowledge. Recorded rumbas in New York City and Havana fed the appetites of members hungry to see rumba performances of themselves or loved ones.

THE VIRTUAL AS A MOVING SPACE

Rumba in NYC members thought globally and *also* lived globally (re-phrasing Clifford's famous idiom). I describe the group as a "moving space" because it can be accessed from almost any geographic location. A *rumbero* accessing Rumba in NYC may be in physical motion, in transit on an airplane, or outside of the two main geographic field sites of this dissertation. A Havana native could access the website in Cuban cities, Canada, in Europe while on a performance tour, or even in the United States. This was the case with young members of Los Muñequitos de Matanzas during their 2011 tour. While my research focus is New York City and Havana, in reality, there were multiple nodes of communication between geographic spaces.

CUBANS CONNECTING TO THE INTERNET

During my second trip to Cuba in 2010, I rented a room at a home that did not have a license to operate as a *casa particular* (a boarding house for tourists). Coincidently, the owner of the *casa* had an illegal Internet connection in her home. Staying at this location gave me a deeper perspective of the Internet habits of Cubans in Havana. I already had a rough idea of young (16-25 age range) Cubans' usage of the Internet. Nory gave me her sister's email address before I traveled to Cuba. Her sister Yeney and I began communicating through email and occasionally through Facebook email. Her response time was about once every 10 days. She provided descriptive

insights of Cuban pop culture, life in Central Havana, and how reggaeton was more popular with her social circle than rumba. Her online practices and frequency of Internet gave me an idea of how and when Cubans could access the Internet.

The illegal Internet connections were part of the underground economy that flourished within Havana. My interlocutors felt the Internet cafes and hotel "business centers" were much too expensive for regular use. There were other ways to connect to the Internet. The owners of the unlicensed *casa particular* felt safe connecting to the Internet only in the mornings and evenings. The owner was not willing to divulge too much information on how much installation cost and who set it up. She said she originally acquired the money to install her Internet connection from family members who lived in Florida. She was even cautious of "jealous" neighbors who might alert the authorities. I knew Central Havana and the surrounding neighborhoods had a high concentration of *rumberos*. I continued asking questions about the extent of Internet usage as I gained more rapport with Havana *rumberos*.

My questions were met with some hesitancy from *rumberos*. Cubans understood inquiries for illicit activities like prostitution, strong prescription drugs, or unlicensed homes for tourists. Asking questions about the Internet was not the normal set of questions that Cubans in Central Havana received. Their resistance alluded to how illegal home Internet connections were clandestine setups shared only with trusted friends and family.

As I built rapport with people in my Central Havana neighborhood near Industria Street and the Malecón, I was able to test the reliability of Internet connections when

using Facebook and Rumba in NYC. The dial-up modems were painfully slow. I was not able to participate in near real-time like members with fast connections. Furthermore, I was not able to upload photos, add comments, and post videos because of the slow connection speed. The unreliability of Internet services and subtle suspicion of home owners made it difficult to spend more than 20 minutes at a time on illegal home connections.

I gained valuable insights as time progressed. I learned that checking email and monitoring Facebook was sometimes a communal affair since the home connections were relatively rare among Cubans residing in Central Havana. From the Cuban side, I was beginning to learn that regular participation in Rumba in NYC would be difficult with just a home connection. The search continued.

Ambitious *rumberos* spoke freely about their plans to share their artistic gifts with the rest of the world. The tourist industry in Havana had already given them a general idea of how to generate income from their art. Most *rumberos* had never heard of El Fogon, but they eagerly asked questions about my entertainment business contacts in the United States. New York City and Los Angeles were the cities that *rumberos* asked me about the most.

Even though I explained that my professional contacts were limited, *rumberos* did not seem to mind. *Rumberos* in their teens, 20s, and early 30s were most likely to ask me to place photos and the recordings on my social networking profiles and other websites devoted to Cuban music. They were not concerned with specific websites or security. I explained that I was going to code names and write with intentional vagueness in parts of

the dissertation because I was dealing with unauthorized Internet connections. This did not seem to be an issue with the *rumberos* I spoke with. Participation on the Internet was a declaration that they were there, living vibrantly, and connected.

Rumberos had differing views about the importance of the Facebook group. Teresa from the Conjuncto Folklórico Nacional did not have much interest in connecting to social media or email. She understood that the group had a website, but access was the job of the group's administration. She was not impressed when I described how *rumberos* in New York City and some *rumberos* in Havana used Rumba in NYC. Teresa personally knew most of the *rumberos* from the top professional groups in Cuba. She explained that the videos only recorded portions of rumbas. Moreover, professional rumbas did not always mean "better" according to Teresa. Spontaneous, informal community rumbas were also important components of the rumba that were important in its continuation.

Teresa was closely affiliated with a generation of *rumberos* who did not have access or completely understand the utility of social media. For *rumberos* who made their professional careers prior to the 2010s, social media was not a factor in their individual successes.

FACEBOOK AND TECHNOLOGIES FACILITATING IDENTITIES IN THE *RUMBA NUEVA*

This section describes the essential features of the Facebook interface that was present during this project. I include the available options that were present as of December 2012. Facebook is a social network website that allows users to create personal "profiles," "friend" other users, upload media, write mini blogs through "status updates,"

join groups, and chat in real time. According to users in Havana, Facebook was the most popular site because it loaded much faster than MySpace. Prior to Facebook, North Americans used a site called Friendster. Friendster transformed into a social gaming site in 2011. MySpace was also popular, but steadily declined in popularity during the final years of the *rumba nueva* in the 2010s.

One of the most important actions in forming the groups on Facebook was “friending” others. Facebook used the term “friend” to describe the action of adding contacts to a member’s friends list. The “friending” process was a foundation of connecting people and forming transnational groups that facilitated the virtual diaspora that connects Havana and New York City *rumberos*.

Other Facebook options helped members construct their online identities. There was a gender section that gave users the option to choose male, female, or leave that area blank. It was possible to post the “relationship” status if a person was single, engaged, in an open relationship, separated, in a civil union, in a domestic partnership, married, divorced, widowed, or post “it’s complicated.” The “work and education” space were physically prominent sections on user’s info pages. The “History by Year” timeline feature gave an entire list of a member’s professional and educational history. These basic features helped users fashion their online identities.

PHOTO CLASSIFICATION

Photos and audiovisual recordings of the rumba were the catalyst that started conversations in the Rumba in NYC group. The ease in posting photos on Facebook's

virtual “walls” added depth to group discussions. I have charted a few types of photos that were the most common in Rumba in NYC. The categorization of photos provided an outline that helped chart the quality and types of discussions that took place in the group.

1. Portrait Photo: This photo was a face close-up usually somewhere in the home. In the early days of social networking when MySpace was popular, bathroom portraits using a mirror as a reflection were popular. Portrait photos of members arriving in Cuba, the United States, or a rumba were common.
2. Party Photo: The party photo is a picture taken when a person is at a social event. Members posted pictures of Cuban themed house parties, living room rumbas, and birthdays.
3. Travel Photo: This works as a visual dairy of a person’s travels throughout the world. Photos of Cuba were popular with *rumberos* and rumba enthusiasts based in New York City.
4. Political Photo: A photo, quoted poster that highlights a social injustice as with a political intention. These photos were not common in the group.
5. Friend Photo*:* This is a photo where the friend of a poster is “tagged” in the photo. Group photos of friends at rumbas were very common. People “tagged” themselves so the photo would show on their profiles also.
6. Music Concert Photo*:* The concert photo can take many forms. The most popular form in this research project was taken from the position of an audience member. These pictures are sometimes grainy because they are taken with cell phones in dark concert halls. Pictures of the New York City performances of Yoruba

Andabo and Los Muñequitos were very popular when I conducted fieldwork in New York City.

7. Standing with an influential figure(s) photo: This photo can be with any influential person in politics, music, dance, cinema, or a sub-culture. The owners of El Fogon mounted a picture of themselves with Matt Dillon behind the bar.
8. Dance Photo: The dance photo taken at a rumba was a form of proof that a *rumba buena* (good rumba) occurred. A *rumba buena* was a perfect mix of song, dance, singing, drumming, and audience participation.

The photo categories above are the most representative categories of photos in Rumba in NYC. Not being mutually exclusive, they can form a medley of self-presentational meanings when photos are placed into "albums." The pictures show social narratives that have specific meanings for cultural diasporas in New York City and Havana that convene in the virtual world.

FILMING AND UPLOADING THE RUMBAS

Audiovisual material was mostly raw footage uploaded from cameras and mobile devices. About 60 percent of the footage was New York City based and 40 percent Havana/Cuba based. David and Berta were two videographers who filmed and uploaded extensively. Their photos and audiovisual media sparked many of the "wall" discussions. David was based primarily at El Fogon while Berta filmed in New York City as well as Cuba.

David used several different cameras to capture multiple angles of the rumba. He brought his own lighting equipment to spotlight El Fogon's small performance stage. He weaved in out of the crowd with a sash of lenses and cameras strapped to his body like magazines of bullets. David was reluctant to share all of the footage from filming at El Fogon because he saw his projects as Afro-centric spiritual endeavors. David placed the rumba in the context of a pan African-diasporic practice rather than a uniquely Cuban creation. Through several conversations we had at El Fogon, he believed funk music, soul, the blues, were thoroughly connected to the artistic spirit – and therefore the community building spirit – of the Cuban rumba. This view was not common and often contested by some New York-based *rumberos,* who believed this view failed to credit the specific Cuban aesthetics in the rumba.

Berta was prolific in recording rumbas and *rumberos* in New York City. She usually had a small, handheld recorder that she used to film close-ups of singers and drummers. She also created a documentary about the Central Park Rumba that was screened at the Bronx Museum. Her short, unedited video clips set the tone of the Rumba in NYC group. Her clips highlighted the individual skills of *rumberos*. It was a form of public acknowledgement that brought attention local *rumberos*. She also used footage during her research trips in Cuba to show less known *rumberos*.

There were other group members who posted media on the group's wall. Classic footage of early New York City rumbas posted by Gene Golden, digitized VHS videos uploaded by a European rumba scholar named Henry, Central Park rumbas uploaded by Tito, countless living room rumbas from Cubans that immigrated to the United States,

and media linked from other websites. Members located in the United States or countries with reliable Internet access seemed to be doing most of the video uploading.

THE VIRTUAL PUBLIC SPHERE AS A COMPLICATED COUNTER-PUBLIC

I argue that Rumba in NYC represents a complicated counter-public to the physical rumba. The Internet has grown in sophistication as an alternative forum to speak to diverse issues as technology has become more accessible to larger portions of the population.

Papacharissi states, "New technologies provide information and tools that may extend the role of the public in the social and political arena" (2009, 9). As new technology changes, so do the ways diasporas use this technology to communicate. Furthermore, communication technologies are important in maintaining transnational relationships with a "homeland" or a mythical "home" for diasporic people (Karim 2003a).

Moving forward with the idea of technology and public spheres, Appadurai explains that technology has created "diasporic public spheres" (Appadurai 1996, 146). Appadurai explains, "These new forms of electronically mediated communication are beginning to create virtual neighborhoods, no longer bounded by territory, passports, taxes, elections, and other conventional political diacritics, but by access to both the software and hardware that are required to connect to these large international computer networks" (1996, 195). I situate my ethnographic work in diaspora media scholarship to

explain how participants in the African diaspora use technology to represent and critique the rumba.

POLITICS AND GENDER IN THE NEW YORK CITY RUMBA COMMUNITY

Rumba in NYC might be a space to critique state institutions. With ever-increasing institutionalization in Cuba, staged rumba venues are not spaces for public critique of governmental policies. In New York City, rumbas are hyper-masculine spaces with sometimes rigid gender roles. I have spoken with accomplished female percussionist that said they were discouraged from playing at rumbas. Consequently, the Rumba in NYC Facebook group provides spaces for *rumberos* to critique governmental policies in Cuba as well as New York City. To be clear, I have not seen any overt anti-Castro writings, but I have seen Cubans critique Cuban governmental policies in terms of immigration, the economy, and travel visas for artists. Additionally, I did not see anti-governmental or anti-policy comments from Cubans that were still living in Havana. I reiterate that Rumba in NYC is a "complicated counter-public" because it both reifies and contests practices in physical spaces.

Rumba in NYC was a space for people that might have little authority in the physical rumba. The New York City rumbas tended to marginalize those who were not proficient percussionists. In New York City, non-Cubans, non-Puerto Ricans, women, people with limited Spanish speaking skills, and artistic novices are part of the group that had little voice in the community. Some Facebook members have written critiques about some of the over-domineering personalities that hindered facilitating inclusive rumba

communities in New York City. Goldberg (2010) created a succinct definition of a public sphere when he wrote:

> While there are a number of differing conceptions of the public sphere (Dahlberg, 2007), for the present purposes I will assume a basic and widely shared definition: a site of social activity comprised of rational discourse which occasions the informal constitution of the public will. In new media scholarship, the development of a networked public sphere is framed as a migration or extension of an already existing public sphere to an online platform, a resuscitation of an ailing public sphere, and/or a first-time venture whose success has been made possible by the advent of digital network technologies (2010, 741).

I use this same definition to explain the significance of Rumba in NYC as a counter-public. First, it transported the rumba beyond the Havana, concerts, and specialized concerts. People unfamiliar with the insular rumba community could easily participate even if they would have been low-status in physical rumbas in Havana or NYC. They would not have the capacity to critique master *rumberos* in these spaces. Lastly, it helped *rumberos* publicize, and sometimes commoditize the rumba.

The consequences of viewing Rumba in NYC as an alternative space for critique, discussion, publicity, marketing, and commodification are that while it enhances the visibility of the rumba, it subtly takes away the locus of power from the poor, socioeconomically disadvantaged *rumberos* in Cuba that do not have access to the Internet group (being the majority of *rumberos* I worked with in this research), to individuals that have the means to connect to the group on a regular basis.

I am also wary about designating Rumba in NYC as a counter-public. The virtual group discusses socio-cultural issues related to the rumba, but there has been no concerted effort to make the Facebook group more accessible *rumberos* in Cuba that might want to take advantage of its social networking capabilities. Valuable social-networking capabilities could increase their artistic visibility in the United States and alter their socio-economic realities in Cuba. According to Papacharissi's perspective (2002, 23), the virtual sphere provides a good place to discuss the rumba, but it is not a public sphere because it does not relate to formal policy change in the political sphere.v I would characterize Rumba in NYC as a "privileged counter-public" that has representational limits.

The limited number of comments posted on Rumba in NYC further complicates the designation of the virtual group as a counter-public to physical rumbas. Many members read comments, but they did not make public statements on the group's wall. The group moderator, Berta Jottar (personal communication to the author, January 2012), said there is a lack of people willing to join debates in fear of being scrutinized for their views. Instead of making their views available online for group members to read, Jottar said members often spoke to her about controversial issues off-line.

An example of a tense online exchange that had limited group debate was with a Cuban photographer of New York rumbas named Juan Caballero. Caballero wrote a comment describing the Santería religion as a backward, outdated belief system. Even though many people disagreed with Juan's statements, less than fifteen Rumba in NYC members joined the public debate. The forum often works as a space for passive

information acquisition instead of an open forum with broad representation from the group's membership.

The language used by academically trained members of the group impeded broad public participation from some members of the group. Some of the most helpful interlocutors in this research project were academically trained *rumberos* with advanced degrees in the social sciences or fine arts. Other contributors that I cite regularly were Jottar, Knauer, Humberto Brown, Barry, and "The Doc." Their adept, authoritative academic language sometimes sounded condescending to people not versed in social theory and ethnomusicology. In this way, the virtual group opened critical spaces of inquiry but also silenced certain voices that did not have that same theoretical dexterity.

JUDGMENTS OF AUTHENTICITY IN THE VIRTUAL SPACE

Authenticity in Rumba in NYC consisted of a complex web of symbols, narratives, practices, and performances. There were broad themes that loomed largely in the conversations that I observed in the virtual space. The most common were 1) Group members used the names of famous *rumberos* to reference specific styles of rumba. Evoking the name of famous *rumberos*, many of them deceased, added historical context to forum conversations. And 2), commenting about a piece of media that a member posted.

There was also a hierarchy of videos, measured in terms of popularity and community response. I judged hierarchy by the number of responses written responses and "likes" each video received. In order of importance, I classified these as: videos of

historic rumba groups in Cuba with an active forum member as a dancer or musician in the video, videos of historic rumbas in Cuba, videos of historic rumbas in New York City, videos of rumbas at El Fogon, Esquina Habanera, Central Park, or the Lower East Side.

Online Discourse Analysis

Below is an example of one of the discussions that highlights how posters used nationality, history, and gender to make strengthen their claims of authenticity. The online exchange began when Berta said skilled *rumberos* do not need to mix Santería movements with traditional rumba. Yesenia disagreed and wrote that that combining certain styles does not mean that the dancer has a limited dance repertoire. I have pasted a segment of the tense exchange below.

Berta Jottar: It is super interesting to hear this Yesenia, as all the dancers I interviewed are older than you!

Yesenia Selier: It's not about age, is about the style of the dance

Berta: Cuban dance and music evolve with its people. Cuba special period transformed the sound, discourse and ways of dance in Cuba. I don't like dancing with my hand…. you know where, for example, what is becoming standard in recent years.

Yesenia: Berta you where the one that were that day in Central Park, I just have you report and understanding of what happen on that day, that moment. I mention Andro, just because I was to El Fogon and have an amazing night

on Friday, because following your argument he most have a "repertoire problem" calling so frequently the nkisis on that night.

Berta: *perdon si me escucho agitada, es emocion. No se nada sobre Andro porque simplemente no estuve ahi en el Fogon, ni se si baila tambien, se que es cantante, so i don't see the connection you are doing ... sobre mi ejemplo de cuando los bailarines de guaguanco mezclan mucho paso de santo, se entiende tambien como falta de repertorio dancistico. O sea, que una cosa es que 1. la rumba sea sintesis de todas las religiones y grupos etnicos que crean la rumba, la sintesis que es la rumba. 2. que los bailarines de guaguanco usen pasos de santeria, chango a menudo, y que esto es parte de una coreografia. 3. que si mezclan un gesto de santo en el guaguanco es hacer un parencesis dentro del guaguanco para dar tributo al orisha de uno, o al espiritu de uno; 4: que cuando las o los bailarines mezclan mucho paso de santo o abakua tambien puede ser sintoma de la falta de repertorio o experiencia del bailarin o bailarina. que realmente una pareja puede bailar guaguanco sin meter un solo gesto de santo o abakua, y que realmente eso es muestra de una exelencia en la improvisacion y creatividad del/la bailarina/o... El punto 4 es el que esta causando sensacion! Ojo con mi disclaimer arriba que no estoy hablando sobre ti. also, veo que MI escritura simplemente no es tan buena y creo que no se entiende lo que estoy diciendo.* So much for the training!

Berta: Henry, I really admire people like you so amazingly able to cover so much bibliography. It is so hard for me to understand the super complex ongoing relations in the rumba actual, what I see in front of me, that for me to imagine I can engage with rumba's ancestral origins for me is an incredible task! So keep the research going, it is simply amazing. Actually, you will love Petra Richterova's PhD dissertation about rumba's origins. She was Prof Farris-Thompson advise and her work is an elaboration of his on rumba. She did travel doing the research all over the world, i am looking forward to see this published! So i am looking forward to Yesenia's work!

Henry van Maasakker: Berta, thanks for the compliments. I think there is a lot in Rumba dancing which is not conscious. The African locomotion (of specific African cultures/dance areas) was not destroyed during slavery although they did intend this. If you look at the Rumba guaguanco Yesenia and Tito are dancing you will immediate recognize the many Santeria/Yoruba moves and steps will dancing. Such as Yemaya and Oshun and the choir is referring to Shango. Of course, there is room for individual expression and improvisation, but, their locomotion show where they come from (unintended of course). What Yesenia is doing is teaching modern Cuban Rumba style dancing, for which concepts have been developed such as "Rumbitas", and, when intermixed with Cuban Son called "Batàrumba". These "new" styles of dancing rumba -

connecting Yoruba/Orishas with Rumba and Son - were very well analyzed by Yvonne Daniel (in the ethnography of Rumba 1989).

Berta attacked Yesenia's claim that mixing styles of the rumba is an artistic choice. Berta did this by insinuating that Yesenia's viewpoints were less valued because she was younger than many influential Cuban *rumberos*. On the defensive, Yesenia then placed the conversation in historical context by referencing stylistic changes that took place during Cuba's Special Period.

This short exchange makes three important points. First, Yesenia reminded the online audience that she was an active performer of the rumba. She said "standard in recent years" to show her familiarity with stylistic changes in the rumba. Second, it shows how Yesenia claimed authority by a demonstration of her authenticity. She subtly reminded readers that she was a Havana native without saying it explicitly. Third, referencing participation in physical rumbas increases her authenticity within the community. Yesenia's points were all helpful ways to look at how *rumberos* use certain tactics to claim authenticity within the virtual community.

Gender and claims to authenticity were important aspects of the exchange. Yesenia responded to Berta by referencing a high status male in the rumba community. Yesenia writes, "I mention Andro, just because I was to El Fogon and have an amazing night on Friday, because following your argument he most have a 'repertoire problem' calling so frequently the nkisis on that night." Yesenia references her relationship to Andro, a member of the Los Muñequitos de Matanzas. Her relationship to a high status male in the community helped bolster the authority of Yesenia's comments.

Berta responds in Spanish, her first language. By writing in Spanish, Berta extends the conversation to group members who have a limited command of English. She also enhances the rhetorical force of her argument when she reverts to Spanish. She clarifies her statements and apologizes for the gruff tone of her responses.

The tone of this conversation is a typical example in the virtual community. Discussions like these were almost always between *rumberos* located in New York City. I never witnessed a Havana based *rumbero* getting in an online argument. I believe this has much to do with connection speeds. Respondents in New York City sometimes replied within seconds of previous posts. Cuban *rumberos* at the time of this research rarely had that luxury.

POSSIBILITIES OF A VIRTUAL DIASPORA CENTERED ON THE RUMBA

Videos posted on the placed on the Internet can be archived as long as there is software to run the media. Rumba in NYC has a repository for rumbas that occurred at venues that no longer exist. The legendary rumbas at Esquina Habanera no longer exist. Rumbas at El Fogon ended shortly after Pupy passed away. Rumba in NYC maintains an extensive catalog of videos that future generations can learn from. This might be the group's greatest asset as the rumba continues to evolve.

Audio-visual recordings from Havana and New York City might give future generations knowledge of the rumba's deep lineages. On a windy day near the Malecón in Havana, Lukumí named influential *rumberos* who influenced his drumming. Lukumí knew these men because he lived in spaces that nurtured his artistic growth as a *rumbero*.

Students who do not have this opportunity can learn remotely by watching archived videos. The Facebook group had information and video clips of great rumba lineages such as Los Muñequitos de Matanzas, the Aspirina, the Dreke, the Chinitos, and the Aragón (Jottar 2011, 60).

Rumba in NYC also highlighted Cuban, African-American, and Puerto Rican *rumbero* lineages in New York City. Gene Golden, a New York City *rumbero* and percussionist of Afro-Cuban religious rhythms, uploaded videos from his more than three decades of experience playing Afro-Cuban music. Listening to and watching some of the early New York City rumba percussionists add a deeper layer of understanding stylistic changes to the art form. The quality of the audio is not optimal, but viewers can still learn the words of popular songs, song improvisational skills, and how each drum plays off others.

Rumba in NYC gave novice *rumberos* the chance to participate in the rumba. When I tried my hand at drumming in Central Park, before anyone was there, teenage *rumberos* explained that I needed to watch YouTube so I could learn how to keep time with the clave. In New York's Central Park, men were physically removed from drums if they could not play their musical role correctly. The videos could be used as low-pressure teaching tools for novice *rumberos*.

Rumba in NYC members could learn which *rumberos* were respected teachers in New York City and Havana rumba communities. During my second research trip to Cuba, I conducted background research on potential dissertation interlocutors by reading comments about specific *rumberos* and groups on Rumba in NYC. Henry was one such

person that received positive feedback from people familiar with the Havana rumba community. Henry's energy and accessible personality invited audience members to fully participate in rumbas. His gyrations, centered in grounded core movement, spoke to the trans-Caribbean style of Cuban popular dance. While I did not ask group members for personal contacts, I was able to learn of influential professional and street rumberos in New York City and Havana.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RUMBA IN NYC FACEBOOK GROUP

There were limitations to experiencing the rumba through Facebook. The rumba complex (music, drum, and dance) is a community affair. It is experienced in a community of *rumberos* of different skill levels. Watching the rumba from a distance transforms the possibilities of participation. The limited amount of participation limits the type of learning that is possible.

The intense sense of belonging is a defining feature of the rumba. The Rumba in NYC group does not replicate intense communal feeling that can occur in physical rumbas. As the music becomes faster, the whole community repeats the lyrics of a song in natural uneven unison, and the physical space between bodies decrease.

As people move closer to the *quinto* (the drum that focuses on solos) and the *tumbadoras* (tall, narrow, single-headed African drums), performers become the audience and the audience the performers. Describing the idea of *communitas*, rituals, and liminal spaces, Victor Turner believed liminal spaces are neither here nor there; they are between

law and custom (1986). The rumba is practiced in ritual spaces and includes ritual passage through the movement of music.

Starting with slow cracks of the two wooden clave, the music calls people into attention as smaller performances happen outside the central performance space. Repetition of the chorus increases as people learn the chorus of a particular song. Turner theorized *communitas* as a process of transformation for the individual as well as the group (ibid). Turner described *communitas* as the "liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc., from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses" (1982). I experienced this sensory expression during numerous informal rumbas in Havana. After two hours of intense, repetitive drumming, dancers generated a temporary utopian community where the social hierarchy of advanced *rumberos* and novices collapsed. Watching the rumba on a laptop screen does not compare to the feelings found in collective singing and moving.

Audiovisual recordings rarely capture both audience and performers. Videographers are rarely in positions to direct the camera lens to both performers and audiences equally. For the majority of video media uploaded, audiences are mostly absent. Viewers can only see body parts in the periphery, dancers taking center stage, or drummers. Consequently, viewers of videos are not able to see all the ways a performer responds to the audience when the videographer focuses on such a narrow view of performances.

CONCLUSION

The Rumba in NYC group provides an avenue, although unequal, for *rumberos* to communicate despite geographic separation. In this chapter, I investigated social media as a lens to describe the socio-cultural changes that occurred during the *rumba nueva*. Moreover, Rumba in NYC is a "complicated counter-public" that gives certain people the space to speak. It is also a privileged space that circumscribes the voices of poor, Cubans of African descent that do not have access to the Internet.

I embarked on this study believing that Internet communication occurred mainly between Havana and New York City. Speaking with *rumberos* in Havana, *rumberos* who grew up in Havana, and Cubans who immigrated to New York City revealed a different stories. New Yorkers dominated virtual conversations because of the ease of accessing Facebook. Cuban *rumberos* participated, but not nearly as often.

Chapter 7 Conclusions and Future Directions for Research

The rumba suffuses physical spaces with an all-encompassing energy. The music not only touches, it goes *through* you. *La rumba es una fiesta!*[10] *La rumba es una parte de mi barrio* is what Lukumí, a young prodigy on the *tumbadoras* would say (Lukumí, personal communication to the author, February 6, 2012). Interlocutors said the rumba brought them to a place of "home." The physical home might be Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Mexico, the United States, the South Bronx, the Lower East Side, Harlem, or New Jersey.

The *rumba nueva* generates interconnected performances of identity in physical and virtual spaces. The field sites are all interconnected even though I wrote separate chapters focused on Havana, New York, and the Rumba in NYC Facebook group. Afro-Latinidad theory helped me address the various differences within these field sites. The Cuban government's support of Cuban *rumberos* helped create a nationalistic, sometimes patriotic vision of the rumba even if it was not universally appreciated in Havana. Even with the esteem (and sometimes prejudice) of the Cuban public, *rumberos* still experienced surveillance from law enforcement due to their skin color and class.

By using a narrative grounded in the embodied perspectives of *rumberos,* I sought to honestly portray their socio-economic viewpoints. I spoke with a range of *rumberos* – from those who traveled globally to those that only played in their neighborhoods.

10 To correctly pronounce this phrase, the "s" in fiesta is silent.

Chapters 2 and 3 documented artistic and cultural exchange within the African diaspora in Cuba and abroad. These chapters addressed the relationships between strategic diaspora alliances, commodification, and the growing popularity of African diaspora art forms. Specifically, some *rumberos* (in New York City and Havana) used the language of diaspora to better position themselves in tourist and performance economies. The implications of this practice are significant. What does it mean when African diasporic artistic principles and ideas are given a price tag? Who has the power to define and police authenticity? Which people are excluded from this conception that subtly molds to market and audience expectations? These are questions worth thinking about.

EMBODIED ETHNOGRAPHY THROUGH PERSONAL PARTICIPATION

My work was informed by the previous *participant performance* and *performance to the stage* research progressed by Pearl Primus and Katherine Dunham. I tried to experience as many aspects of the rumba as possible. I ate the food that *rumberos* ate. The act of breaking bread around a table was one of the best ways to listen to *rumberos'* viewpoints on their art making practices. I practiced the rumba in *barrios*, with artists that did not intend to play internationally. I was better able to understand how the rumba was a communal practice. I worked on dance technique at intimate family gatherings where Cubans were not afraid to speak their minds. I documented the sometimes strict gender roles that *rumbero* communities followed. I took classes to learn the larger, broader technique for staged performances that seemed to become more popular in New York City. I endured countless insults as *rumberos* taught me how to "move like a Cuban," or

interestingly, "dance like a black person." These structured classes helped me move like a *rumbero*. Understanding technique was only one aspect of the performance.

There were lessons and performances that were just as important as technique. There were certain ways to talk to law enforcement. *Rumberos* were verbal masters of negotiating with the authorities during the day, in open areas, with witnesses. Things changed at night, when law enforcement seemed to have a restrained fear of black male bodies in large groups. The subtle tapping of the baton, which I witnessed in both Havana and New York City, was a sign that officers had violence on their minds.

A *rumbero* needed to know how to maintain an air of dignity when he was told that he could not enter hotels. He needed to know how to tip his hat with grace as he was reminded that he could not even wait in the lobby.

This project documented different performance types in rumba communities. In Havana, a *rumbero* needed to maintain his composure when as a performer, he was asked to enter through the back doors because he was supposedly not dressed properly. A *rumbero* needed to know how to relax the body as he was pressed against the wall, roughly fondled under the guise of "stop-and-frisk". Moving too much gave officers the power to inflict severe beatings.

He learned how to be loud. He was loud because he was an urban intellectual as well as an entertainer. The reactionary performances against raced and classed violence were no less important for *rumberos* than a two hour dance workshop.

Rumberos spoke of themselves as an African diaspora despite phenotypic differences in part because they endured subtle social and state violence while

participating in rumbas. The rumba darkened audiences during the time it was performed. *Rumberos* of all hues were subject to being stereotyped with the characteristics of blackness. Isabel, a person who knew *rumberos* and practiced Afro-Cuban religions, believed that *rumberos* were artistically skilled blacks that had close links with the criminal world. This speaks to the race and classed stereotypes that *rumberos* endure. There was truth to Isabel's assertion. Songs and gesture mimicked the culture of streetwise men and women from Havana, Matanzas, and Santiago de Cuba.

Law enforcement surveillance in Havana and New York City also helped create feelings of a broader African diaspora–sometimes under siege. Even with the Cuban State's public support of *rumberos,* I recorded constant policing of spaces that were visited by tourists. Young Afro-Cuban males were systematically questioned by police, even when carrying instruments to play shows at hotels.

The continued presence of law enforcement at the Central Park rumbas in the 1990s and 2000s provides credence to some *rumberos'* beliefs that they were persecuted because their identities as poor people of African descent. When police informed *rumberos* of park regulations (in the 1990s and 2000s citied for noise prohibitions and cited primarily for garbage, smoking, or alcohol prohibitions while I conducted ethnographic research), the male *rumberos* in their 20s and 30s, mostly Nuyoricans, described how the police always "fucked with" people in their neighborhoods. Sadly, *rumberos* in both Havana and New York City were accustomed to surveillance and harsh treatment.

SOCIOPOLITICAL CHANGE AS MAPPED BY ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

Rather than a homogeneous, multi-national group of African descendants, rumba communities were complicated, shifting entities with associations dictated by class and national ancestry. Class, national, gendered, and racial based beliefs backgrounds produced fault lines that presented themselves in conflict.

The rumba could also create a temporary, libratory politics. *Rumberos* felt that connecting with other people of color with possible African heritage was a rebellious act. They were building a multi-ethnic, multi-national community under the banner of a believed shared African heritage. As data from Havana revealed, grouping based on a belief in the African diaspora had concrete advantages. Havana *rumberos* that sought to make careers understood the language that had currency among scholarly and artistic circles.

The economic changes to Cuba after the fall of the Soviet Union were significant. I theorized this as a defining characteristic of the *rumba nueva.* I attempted to show economic changes in Cuba through the personal stories of interlocutors. *Rumberos* worked hard to select positions for themselves in Cuba's flourishing tourist industry. Artistic practices changed because of this. To appeal to a broader range of audiences, most staged rumbas included a significant portion of sacred and popular music. In Havana, I found that it was sometimes easier to find a staged rumba with majority foreign audiences than a rumba created solely for the enjoyment of local communities.

In New York City, what had traditionally been a predominately Puerto Rican practice had expanded into a multi-national, multi-ethnic, event with African-Americans,

Dominicans, Cubans of various emigration periods, Panamanians, and North Americans from various backgrounds. With iterations of their "black roots," *rumberos* of different nationalities highlighted the African descendant legacies from their national histories. This is significant since *rumberos* strategically strengthened these networks through business networks (Cuban cultural tours and tours for Cuban artists), social media communication, and describing themselves as an African diaspora. Even though the belief systems about the African diaspora differed, *rumberos* had a broad conception of the African diaspora and the rumba's place within it.

DIFFERENTIAL DEPLOYMENT OF ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

New Internet social media communication changed how skilled *rumberos* marketed themselves. New relationships were created that displayed an edited reality. Differing from my initial beliefs that Internet social media was used to make intimate connections with family and friends, my interlocutors believed it was more useful as a promotional tool for a professional music career or a news ticker tape. Andro, a young, gifted singer from the Los Muñequitos de Matanzas was a savvy social media marketer when took residence in New York City in 2013. On his Facebook profile, he presented a barrage of self-portrait pictures and information about his shows at El Fogon.

Pupy, who sometimes had others monitor his Facebook page, used media to promote his artistic views on Afro-Cuban culture. Pupy came to the United States to share Afro-Cuban culture with Americans that were hungry to learn the spiritual and artistic secrets of Cubans of African descent (Felix "Pupy" Insua, performance speech at

El Fogon Center of the Arts, June 22, 2011). He was one of the few *rumberos* that could teach the dance technique of the *rumba*, *abakuá*, *palo*, and *santería*. He probably would not have been able to obtain the same media exposure had he stayed in Havana.

Pupy situated himself in a North American market that had very little Afro-Cuban artistic competition compared to Havana. Afro-Latinidad theory accounts for the *rumberos'* agency while recognizing the economic incentives and economic barriers that influenced *rumberos'* choices about self-identification. David Stanly, El Fogon's official videographer, created stylized videos that helped expand Pupy's promotional capacities. I contend that Pupy's strong identification with an African diaspora was helpful when he built networks of arts professionals that helped buttress his career.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should address the current state of social media use in Havana and New York City. The slow liberalization of Cuba's economy means people can purchase cars, expand their businesses, and have greater access to Cuban convertible dollars. Supplementary scholarly work could assess the current level of Cuban's participation on Facebook and social media in general.

As of March 3, 2014, Cuba launched the "nauta.cu" email service for Cubans. It would be interesting to learn how Cubans in Havana are connecting to the Internet. Some Havana journalists receive an allotted amount of Internet hours per month. The *Miami Herald*, usually critical of the Cuban government, wrote that residents alleged that

journalists can sell their extra hours on the black market for one to five dollars (CUC) (Tamayo 2014).

Rumberos in Havana and New York City referenced African ancestors and Afro-Cuban religious ancestors interchangeably. The religious Afro-Cuban community traversed the rumba community, placing its own hierarchies in the rumba. They held privileged spaces, able to merge both the secular and spiritual worlds. Future research will discuss the connections between race, rumba, and Afro-Cuban religious traditions in the current moment.

Ideally, future researchers will look at how these new developments intersect with the rumba. I am interested in how the increased availability of rumba footage via the Internet has shaped ethnic, national, and gender lines in the New York City rumba community. I hope this project raised questions about Internet usage from a marginalized group that has found an avenue to gain international recognition.

There are troubling questions that still remain after the drums have stopped. What does it mean when Afro-Cuban aesthetics and principles are commodified for foreign consumption? Plane tickets, visas, tour guides, hotel stays, and exit taxes increase the Cuban government's coffers. I wonder about members of the Afro-Cuban community that do not have anything to sell. Will they benefit from the increased global popularity of Afro-Cuban art forms? Only time will tell.

Glossary

Abakuá – Afro-Cuban men's fraternity/secret society and religious practices from southeastern Nigeria and southwestern Cameroon

Aché or **aché** – A West African Santeria/Yoruba based belief in the universal life-force present in all things; commonly used as an affirmation or a wish for good luck in secular settings

Aficionados – An ardent fan, devotee, enthusiast

Afro-Latinidad theory – A theoretical framework that centers on the lived experiences of people of African descent that have heritage from the Caribbean and Latin America

Afrocubanismo – The 1920s and 1930s artistic/cultural Afro-Cuban music and art movement that was melded or "softened" for middle-class white audiences

Arroz con pollo – A popular classic chicken and rice dish throughout Spain, Latin American and the Caribbean

Babalawo or Babaaláwo – A priest in the Santería religion

Barracones – Big hut; booth; bunkhouse (in the Caribbean) building used to house workers (on a farm); barracks in English

Barrio – Neighborhood; used interchangeably as a general term for neighborhood or the specific East Harlem Puerto Rican neighborhood commonly called *El Barrio;* Spanish term for the "Hood"

Barrios marginales – A Spanish term literally meaning marginal neighborhoods; Low income or impoverished neighborhoods in Havana

Batá – A grouping of three double-headed, hour-glass shaped sacred drums (iyá, itótele and okónkolo) used in Santería ceremonies; Unconsecrated drums can be used for non-religious events

Bembé – A type of ritual ceremony with music and dancing in Santería where the Orishas (dieties) are summoned to join the community

Berimbau – A percussive single-stringed percussion instrument used in the Afro-Brazilian dance and martial art form known as *capoeira*

Blanca – The term for a white person used mostly to describe tourists from Canada, Europe, or the United States; Rumberos (Afro-Cuban rumba artists) in Havana used it to describe white Cubans

Bolero – A slow type of music originated in Spain in the gypsy community that grew in popularity in the late 19th century to the present day

Bomba – An Afro-Puerto Rican music form created commonly thought to be created in Mayagüez by enslaved Africans who worked in the sugar cane fields

Cajón – Six-sided wooden boxes of various sizes with holes on the side used to create percussion in rumba dance music

Campanas – A large cowbell used in the *batarumba* style of rumba dance music

Candomblé – Afro-Brazilian religion largely descended from the Yoruba people in present day Nigeria

Capoeiristas – Practitioners of Capoeira – an Afro-Brazilian martial art that combines dance, acrobatics and music

Casa particular – Literally Spanish for “private house” meaning private accommodations or private homestays in Cuba similar to a bed and breakfast or vacation rental

Cascara – A specific rhythm in the rumba played on drums that also could be played with sticks or sometimes spoons

Columbia – The male solo (fastest energetic) style of the rumba

Comparsa – Cuban carnival music in the style of Spain, the Caribbean, and South America; An ensemble of people at carnival in same costume with masks

Conga or tumbadora – A tall narrow single headed African drum created in Cuba

Conjuncto Folkloríco Nacional – Cuba’s National Folkloric Company

Conjuntos – A small type of ensemble in Latin American musical traditions in Mexico and Cuba

Creole – A native born of mixed European and African ancestry

Croquetas – Fried food rolls usually filled with meat.

Cubanidad – The idea of being Cuban or a national Cuban identity

CUC – Cuban convertible peso, the currency for foreigners in Cuba

Despidida – Spanish word meaning the act of saying goodbye; farewell

Dyambu – Kilonga word meaning word, opinion, thought, or judgment

El color no importa – Spanish idiom meaning “skin color doesn’t matter”

Gauaguanco – The most popular style of the three styles of rumba usually danced with a partner of the opposite sex where the man does the characteristic *vacuna* (vaccination) to his female partner

Gitano – Roma or colloquial word for gypsy

Guayabera – A long-sleeve, four-pocket shirt popular in Cuba, Mexico, and Central America

Isla – Island; sometimes used in the New York City rumba scene as a metonym for the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Puerto Rico, or other Caribbean islands

Itótole – The middle sized drum that engages in the batá ensemble

Iyabó – Male and female first year initiate in the Santería religion where the initiate must follow certain rules on dress, contact, people, food, and behavior

Iyá – The largest drum in the *batá* ensemble

Jineteros – Term used to describe men or women that connect tourists to legal or illegal activities; A petty criminal

Kangol hat – A type of flat brim hat popular with *rumberos*

Kawo Kabiyesi – A salute to Shango meaning "Sail, His Majesty"

Kompa or **compa** – Haitian music danced in pairs since the 1800s

La raza cosmica – A racial theory advocated by Jose Martí, a 19th century Cuban scholar, claiming that a racial mixture of Spanish, African, and indigenous character traits would create a superior race that could transcend each groups' negative qualities

La rumba es mi vida – A Spanish idiom meaning "Rumba is my life"

Latinidad – The concept of being and becoming Latino

Luchador/luchadora – A Cuban man or women who connects tourists with legal or illegal goods or services

Mestizo – In Cuba, the term to describe mixed race persons, most often of Spanish and African ancestry

Moneda nacional – The "national peso" currency accepted by most shops that sell fruit, vegetables, and meats

Moreno – Dark skin, considered by many Puerto Ricans to be a legacy of their indigenous Taino roots

Mulatto – Mixed black and white ancestry

Negrito – Often used as term of affection for a black person in Cuba; Cuban and Puerto Rican rumberos also used this term of endearment for friends and fellow rumberos

Orisha – A diety in the Santería religion thought to have power over the forces of nature and human affairs, seen as guardian spirits

Palo – A religion with origins in the Congo basin of central Africa

Patrimonio cultural de la nación – Spanish for cultural heritage of the nation usually bestowed by the Cuban Ministry of Culture

Prieto – A very dark skinned black person

Okónkolo – The smallest drum of the *batá* ensemble

Quinto – A drum that performs solo as one of the three Cuban drums (salidor, segunda, and quinto) used in the performance of rumba dance music

Reggaeton – A music genre whose sound derives from reggae and various other music genres

Regla de ocha – Another name for the Santería religion

Rumba Buena – “Good Rumba” - a perfect mix of song, dance, singing, drumming, and audience participation

Rumba nueva – Rumba with trans-nationality, connectivity through social media and transformations under the “Special Period” of the Cuban economy that emerged in the 1990s, as distinct different from previous iterations of rumba

Rumbera – A female rumba performer

Rumbero – A male rumba performer

Sabado de la rumba – Rumba performed on Saturdays at the Conjuncto Folkloríco Nacional’s Gran Palenque

Salchichon – Puerto Rican salami

Salidor – One of the three Cuban drums (salidor, segunda, and quinto) used in the performance of rumba dance music

Salsa – Music style popularized in New York City in the 1970s

Samba – A dance and music style created in Bahia, Brazil

Santería – A syncretic Afro-Cuban spiritual practice

Segunda – One of the three Cuban drums (salidor, segunda, and quinto) used in the performance of rumba dance music

Septetos – Orchestra ensembles composed of seven musicians

Shango – The Orisha or guardian spirit of thunder.

Solares – The word for barracks in Spanish

Son – A slow, sensual dance style, predecessor to the modern Salsa

Timba – A hard driving style of Salsa music that has funk, jazz, soul, and pop influence that emerged in the late 1980s.

Trigueño – A very light skinned, straight haired person with African ancestry

Tumbadoras – A tall, narrow, single-headed African drum, often called "congas" outside of Cuba

Vacuna - literally "vaccination," this is a symbolic, sexualized thrust to female dancers in the Guaguanco style of dance.

Yambú – The slow rumba style where dancers mimic the movements of older people

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