

# NATIONAL SYMBOL OR “A BLACK THING”?: RUMBA AND RACIAL POLITICS IN CUBA IN THE ERA OF CULTURAL TOURISM

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The Afro-Cuban music and dance genre rumba has historically been considered *una cosa de negros* (a black thing) and reviled due to racialized stereotypes that link the practice with *el bajo mundo* (the low life), excessive alcohol use, and violence. Nevertheless, the socialist Revolutionary government has sought to elevate rumba's status during the past half century as part of a larger goal of foregrounding and valorizing the African contributions to Cuban identity and culture. In addition to rumba's association with blackness, it is often portrayed as a particularly potent symbol of the masses and working-class identity, which constitutes another, perhaps more significant, reason why the Revolution has aimed to harness rumba to its cultural nationalist discourse. Finally, unlike Afro-Cuban religious practices, which until the early 1990s were heavily marginalized within the context of an official policy of “scientific atheism,” rumba is a secular practice. In short, it is the most significant and popular black-identified tradition on the island.

In this article, I discuss the contemporary situation of rumba performance in various Cuban cities, highlighting the impact of the cultural tourism industry and arguing that it reinforces, with both positive and negative effects for musicians, the long-standing racialization of rumba as *una cosa de negros*. I believe that despite the discursive valorization of the practice found in much Cuban scholarship and political rhetoric, rumba continues to be identified with a particular and marginalized sector of the population.

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In many ways, the complex situation of rumba performance conforms to the more general trend of contemporary racial politics on the island. While it would be very difficult to prove that rumba faces racial bias in the era of cultural tourism, particularly as this would be a politically sensitive issue for an American researcher to raise with representatives of the Cuban state, my primary aim is to foreground the experiences and perceptions of musicians vis-à-vis the continuing racialization of rumba.

### Rumba's Place within the National Cultural Imaginary

Primarily influenced by the instruments, rhythmic patterns, formal features, and dances from Central and West African traditions, rumba has always been a hybrid musical practice that also integrates elements of European melody and Spanish language and poetic forms. Rumba emerged as the main musical accompaniment for parties and secular festivities in poor black and racially mixed communities in western Cuba in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Although a decidedly secular performance tradition, rumba was influenced by percussion ensembles and dances associated with both sacred and profane African traditions, primarily those of Bantu origin such as *yuka* and *makuta* (León 1991; Crook 1992). This close association with Afro-Cuban sacred practices stems from rumba's probable emergence within *cabildos de nación* (Martínez Rodríguez 1998), colonial-era mutual aid societies formed by Africans and their descendants whose official purpose was to orient newly arrived slaves to life in Cuba. *Cabildos* were formed principally along African ethnic lines—for example, the Lucumís (Yoruba) had their *cabildo*, the Congos (Bantu) had a separate one, and so on—although in practice there was a good deal of interethnic exchange within the societies (Delgado 2001). They also functioned as the primary venues for slaves and free blacks to continue practicing their musical and religious traditions and as a site of cultural exchange between Africans of different ethnic groups, creating the conditions for the emergence of syncretic genres such as rumba (Crook 1992). By the early twentieth century, *cabildos* had all but died out due to policies instituted after emancipation (1886), although there are still a few extant ones in different Cuban cities.

Throughout the twentieth century, rumba occupied shifting positions within the cultural nationalist discourse. In the early decades, rumba was a marginalized and criminalized cultural practice owing to its associations with poor and working-class blacks, many of whom had migrated from the countryside to the port cities of Havana and Matanzas to search for employment as dockworkers after emancipation (Crook 1992). During the nation-building decades of the 1920s and 1930s, rumba, in addition to

other Afro-Cuban popular genres such as *son* and *comparsa*, was appropriated and stylized by nationalist composers such as Amadeo Roldán and reinterpreted as a national music practice (R. Moore 1997). Although the *afrocubanismo* movement—as this group of composers, artists, and intellectuals was called—promoted the importance of African contributions to national culture, ethnomusicologist Robin Moore problematizes the notion that its proponents were interested primarily in advancing racial equality. He notes that they championed and created European-derived art music that incorporated particular Afro-Cuban elements but were still hostile to Afro-Cuban traditions themselves, such as rumba and *son* (R. Moore 1997, 133). As such, even *afrocubanista* scholars like Fernando Ortiz and Emilio Grenet presented distorted characterizations of rumba that tended to focus exclusively on its African-ness. Grenet, for example, described rumba song in a very simplistic manner, stating that it consists of a refrain that lasts eight measures and “is repeated indefinitely” and that “the melody is almost always a pretext for the rhythm which is everything in this popular genre. Thus, the greatest number of rumbas are written with absurd text which generally is a result of the rhythmical impulse” (Grenet 1939, 47). In contrast, my ethnographic observations concur with the assertion made by Philip Pasmanick (1997) that, despite the tendency in published scholarship to focus heavily on the percussion and rhythmic aspects of the practice, rumba song—which features both African-derived and Spanish elements—is considered by musicians to be just as important and complex.

After the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, the socialist government began to institutionalize the performance of rumba and Afro-Cuban sacred traditions, which was taken as evidence of the Castro regime’s dedication to the elimination of class and racial inequalities. Dance scholar Yvonne Daniel elucidates the symbolic significance of the government’s choice of rumba to represent the newly socialist nation: “[rumba] gets closest to the member of Cuban society who is most venerated ideologically . . . *los humildes, los jíbaros, los negros pobres, los trabajadores* [the humble, peasants, poor blacks, workers]” (Daniel 1995, 114). Nonetheless, she notes that the socialist government’s incorporation of rumba into institutional spaces was not merely an egalitarian gesture, but was partly designed to discipline rumba performance and curtail “undesirable” behavior, such as drinking and fighting (Daniel 1995, 61). While there has been a widespread academic elevation of rumba as an important symbol of *Cubanidad* (Cubanness) since the Revolution, this discursive valorization has not always been accompanied by institutional and economic support of its performance, nor have all Cubans come to see the practice as representative of their national identity. Furthermore, the profound socioeconomic changes the island has undergone in the last two decades—including a

shift in racial politics—has resulted in a complex and somewhat contradictory situation for rumba performance.

### The “Special Period” and the Transfer of Power from Fidel to Raúl Castro

It is difficult to overemphasize the significance of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990 and the resultant economic and social havoc that was wreaked upon this small island nation in the wake of losing its principal patron and trade partner. The early 1990s witnessed the Cuban economy contract by 40 percent owing to the loss of trade relationships with the Eastern European socialist bloc countries (de la Fuente 2001, 317). The decade of the 1990s is commonly referred to as the Special Period—a term coined by Fidel Castro to signify a period of extreme economic crisis—and was characterized by drastic shortages of basic food, toiletry products, and medicine; soaring inflation on staple items; and frequent blackouts. Although the economy began to recover with the expansion of the tourism industry and other market-oriented measures in the late 1990s, many Cubans still feel they are living in the Special Period when they compare their current living standards to those during Soviet subsidization. As has been well documented, the Castro government quickly understood the necessity of opening up the island to foreign tourism and investment in order to salvage the socialist system and state subsidization of education, health care, and staple foods. Foreign tourism steadily increased during the mid- to late 1990s, and recent government figures suggest that Cuba has continued to receive large numbers of tourists—over two million each year from 2004 to 2009—with Canadians constituting the largest group (Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas 2009). In 1995 the government relaxed restrictions on foreign investment, permitting foreigners to own more than a 50 percent share in joint business ventures (Lardner 2005, 194). Spain has been Cuba’s closest business partner since the mid-1990s, and in an ironic twist, Havana’s most famous hotel, the Habana Libre (Free Havana), is owned by Spaniards.

In order to curb the flourishing trade in dollars on the black market, the Castro government in 1993 decriminalized the possession of foreign currency, sanctioned self-employment (with the requirement to solicit a license from and pay heavy taxes to the state), and introduced private agricultural markets (Perna 2005, 57). One of the biggest changes involved a “dollarization” of the economy—or the legalization of the U.S. dollar—and the establishment of a dual currency system. Since 1993, the two circulating currencies in Cuba are *moneda nacional* (national currency), represented by the Cuban peso, and *divisa* (hard currency), represented by the Cuban convertible peso (CUC). The exchange rate of the peso to the CUC has been

24:1 for several years now.<sup>1</sup> Although dollar stores were created primarily to serve the needs of increasing numbers of foreigners in Cuba, this two-tier currency system has resulted in increasing economic inequality and class stratification among Cubans. Dollar stores offer a noticeably superior quality and quantity of goods as compared to the stores that sell in *moneda nacional*, and during the 1990s certain food and hygiene items became available for purchase only in dollar stores. The salaries provided to all Cuban workers in state jobs, which average around 300 pesos (or \$12.50 CUC) a month, are insufficient to pay for products sold in dollar stores, many of which could be classified as staple rather than luxury items.<sup>2</sup> Cubans who work in the tourist sector, where it is possible to earn part of one's income in *divisa*, or those who receive regular remittances from relatives abroad, are able to afford the exorbitant prices of products in dollar stores. However, the majority of Cubans, who earn in pesos only, are forced to *inventar* (invent, or find a way) to supplement their meager incomes by robbing merchandise or material from their state jobs in order to sell on the black market at a price reduced from that charged in the state-run dollar stores. It is commonly acknowledged that most employees, no matter what their occupation, pilfer from their state jobs in order to supplement their income.

In August 2006, it was announced that Fidel Castro Ruz, leader of Cuba for the previous forty-seven years, was suffering from an undisclosed illness and would be temporarily stepping down and handing off his duties to his brother, Raúl Castro Ruz. The transfer of power was made permanent in February 2008. Despite the fact that the economic problems have continued—and, in fact, have worsened owing to the global economic crisis—there do seem to be signs of change in the past five years. Raúl Castro has made a series of policy decisions that paint him as a more pragmatic

1. CUCs were initially equivalent to the value of the U.S. dollar, but in late 2004 Fidel Castro “de-dollarized” the economy as a response to the Bush administration’s hardening of the embargo against Cuba. All state entities in Cuba stopped accepting U.S. dollars and instituted a 20 percent commission charge for exchanging them for CUCs. In early 2011, this onerous exchange rate—whose primary victims were not the U.S. government but average Cubans and their U.S.-based relatives sending remittances—was improved a bit, and the current rate of exchange is about \$0.87 CUC per dollar.

2. All Cubans are given *libretas*, ration books that allow them to purchase basic food and hygiene items in pesos at low, government-subsidized prices. However, since the Special Period, the amount of food allotted per person per month—for example, six ounces of chicken and two-thirds of a cup of cooking oil—is inadequate to satisfy the needs of an average Cuban kitchen. Cubans are forced to buy the rest of their cooking oil at the dollar store for around \$2.50 CUC per liter (or in pesos on the black market for a little less), which can eat up as much as one-fourth of an average monthly salary. Since 2010 the state has been removing certain items from the *libreta*, such as toiletries, and there has even been talk of eliminating the system altogether, which would be catastrophic for the average Cuban in that it would take away one of the principal benefits of a socialist system.

leader than his ideologically oriented brother, and he has been explicit about critiquing the inefficiency within state bureaucracies and advocating decentralization of the economy. The government has removed restrictions on a number of services and amenities previously available only to foreigners, including the right to buy DVD players and computers, the right to stay in hotels in “tourist zones,” the right to rent cars, and the right to open cellular phone accounts. In line with Raúl Castro’s statement that “egalitarianism . . . had encouraged sloth” (Frank 2009), dramatic policy changes were announced in early 2011, including the government’s intent to lay off half a million workers and to substantially increase the sector of individual private enterprise by issuing hundreds of thousands of new licenses. Finally, as of late 2011, Cubans are now free to buy and sell their homes and vehicles, which, instead of constituting a new freedom, has simply legalized sales that were before conducted on the black market.

### Racial Politics under the Revolution and the Re-exacerbation of Racialized Inequalities in the Era of Cultural Tourism

The issue of racial equality in Cuba has been the subject of much scholarship, with many scholars highlighting the contradictions contained in the gap between the nationalist hybridity discourse (which extols the virtues of a mixed-race populace and tends to deny racial difference) and the realities of inequality faced by Afro-Cubans since independence in 1898 (Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs 1993, 2000; de la Fuente 2001; Puri 2004; Sawyer 2006). One of the most obvious examples of this contradiction was the *blanqueamiento* or “whitening” campaigns of the early twentieth century, when various Cuban governments encouraged the immigration of Spaniards and other Europeans to the island in order to dilute and eventually expunge the African elements of national culture. After the Revolution, the government quickly took early steps to prohibit racial discrimination in the public sector, with Fidel Castro redefining Cubanidad as “Latin-African” (Castro 1976). However, while the Revolution’s commitment to desegregation in the public sphere undoubtedly resulted in higher literacy rates and living standards among Afro-Cubans, post-Revolutionary nationalist discourse has continued to gloss over socioeconomic inequalities between differently racialized groups. It has also failed to account for the fact that Afro-Cubans are still underrepresented in positions of power and suffer from disproportionate poverty, racial profiling, and high incarceration rates (de la Fuente 2001; Sawyer 2006; Blue 2007). In addition, they are still somewhat invisible in high-profile cultural arenas, such as television and film, where black characters tend to

be either absent or very marginal to the storyline (Knight 2000). Finally, as Pérez Sarduy and Jean Stubbs write (Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs 1993), the socialist government's claims to have eradicated racism and other forms of discrimination have had the impact of shutting down public debate on issues of race in contemporary Cuba. Cuban exile Carlos Moore has argued that asserting a *black* Cuban identity in a "raceless" society has often been interpreted by the government as counterrevolutionary (Moore 1988), and he has chronicled his own detention by the authorities in the early 1960s, when he attempted to highlight continuing racism under the Revolution (Moore 2008).

Cuba historian Alejandro de la Fuente (2008) asserts that in recent years, black artists and intellectuals have succeeded in pushing the government to publicly recognize and begin to address issues of racial inequality and to admit that full equality for blacks was never achieved under the Revolution. However, there has yet to be instituted any policy changes to counteract racist and discriminatory practices, particularly those that have arisen with the introduction of market-oriented economic measures (see below). In addition, the defensive response on the part of Cuban intellectuals to a recent public condemnation by African-American leaders of the racism that blacks have faced under the Castro regimes suggests that the academic elite is still not ready to fully acknowledge the extent of the problem.<sup>3</sup> Among other arguments, Revolutionary intellectuals have often attributed continuing racism to the private sphere, that is, to prejudicial attitudes toward blacks held by individuals and within families, thus implying that the state should not be held responsible (Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs 2000). Finally, as recently as March 2013, a new controversy arose in which prominent black scholar Roberto Zurbarano was stripped of his leadership position at the prestigious research institution Casa de las Américas after publishing an op-ed piece in the *New York Times* arguing that Afro-Cubans had not yet gained full equality under the Revolution.<sup>4</sup>

3. See <http://afrocubaweb.com/actingonourconscience.htm> for the declaration/petition, which was organized by Carlos Moore, and [http://www.lajiribilla.cu/2009/n447\\_11/447\\_29.html](http://www.lajiribilla.cu/2009/n447_11/447_29.html) for the response by Cuban intellectuals.

4. The op-ed piece can be found at [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/24/opinion/sunday/for-blacks-in-cuba-the-revolution-hasnt-begun.html?\\_r=1&gwh=332A127AF72F53FF5B2B385C87465915](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/24/opinion/sunday/for-blacks-in-cuba-the-revolution-hasnt-begun.html?_r=1&gwh=332A127AF72F53FF5B2B385C87465915). Much of the controversy surrounding this op-ed was due to its title, "For Blacks in Cuba, the Revolution Hasn't Begun," suggesting that the Revolution hadn't yet even *begun* to address racial inequality, rather than its content. Zurbarano subsequently asserted that the *New York Times* changed the original title of his piece, which translated to "The Country to Come: And My Black Cuba?," and argued that the Revolution was not yet *complete* for blacks in Cuba. Thus, the *New York Times* title implied that no progress had been made, while Zurbarano was arguing that while certain goals had been achieved, there was still progress to be made. For more details on Zurbarano's demotion and the fallout from the op-ed, see <http://www.afrocubaweb.com/zurbano-changes-jobs.html>.

Although there have been some democratizing measures taken under Raúl Castro's leadership, the recent economic changes have seriously undermined the philosophies of egalitarianism and collectivism that are at the heart of Cuban Revolutionary ideology. Several scholars have written about the re-exacerbation of race and class inequalities since the Special Period that can be directly correlated to three phenomena: the expansion of the tourism sector, the establishment of a dual currency system, and the authorization of individual private enterprise. In addition, as discussed below, race has also made a difference in terms of who has access to foreign remittance dollars. Furthermore, "tourist apartheid" policies, or the policing of Cubans in tourist zones, are often implemented through racial profiling: while in theory all Cubans have been subject to harassment by the police, skin color is often taken as a primary signifier of Cuban nationality, and whites are much less likely to be stopped than blacks because they can "pass" as foreigners.

Scholars have discussed the pervasiveness of racist hiring practices in the tourism industry, particularly the fact that there appears to be an explicit preference for employing lighter-skinned Cubans (de la Fuente 2001; Chávez 2005; Sawyer 2006). Alejandro de la Fuente states that rather than rejecting black applicants outright because of their skin color, "some 'aesthetic' and cultural factors are frequently noted to justify the exclusion of blacks on the ground that they lack the physical and educational attributes needed to interact with tourists" (de la Fuente 2001, 320). In 1995 the Spanish-owned Habana Libre hotel was accused of attempting to "whiten" its staff, using the excuse that light-skinned foreigners would not feel comfortable dealing with black Cuban employees (Lardner 2005, 194). Thus, racist hiring practices have often been justified by invoking the perceived discriminatory and prejudicial attitudes of the foreign management and European and Canadian tourists.

It is in these rationalizations that one can comprehend the enduring currency of the "myth of racial equality" (Helg 1995)—the idea that racially hybrid nations and their citizens are inherently antiracist—which tends to project the problem of societal racism onto "neocolonial" or capitalist powers or influences. In fact, my own experience on the island corresponds to the widespread opinion among foreign scholars that racism is a homegrown product which is alive and well in Cuba today, particularly in the private sphere and not only among white Cubans. It can be evidenced in everyday references to *pelo malo* (literally, bad hair, meaning kinky hair associated with blacks) and in comments like, *Ella es negra pero con pelo bueno* (She's black but has good/straight hair), suggesting that this (white) physical trait automatically offsets the assumed unattractiveness of her skin color. Also illustrative of societal racism in Cuba is the pervasive-

ness of racist jokes that invoke stereotypes of black hypersexuality or criminality and the widespread assumption that all blacks and *mulatos* have the desire to *adelantar*, or whiten their offspring by marrying a white or light-skinned Cuban. Unfortunately, with the new barriers faced by Afro-Cubans to lucrative employment in tourism, “These ideas . . . are no longer confined to ‘people’s heads’” (de la Fuente 2001, 326). That is, Cubans have become less inhibited about expressing racist and essentialist ideas openly, and these notions are being utilized to justify discriminatory practices in the public sphere.

Following the economic liberalization of the Special Period, a class of nouveaux riche Cubans has emerged, constituted by those who have access to dollars through jobs in tourism, remittances from family members living abroad, and/or private enterprise. Research indicates that Afro-Cubans tend to be underrepresented within all three of these avenues (de la Fuente 2001; Sawyer 2006; Blue 2007). Remittances have become a particularly important source of dollars, not only because they allow Cubans on the island to buy essential products that are unavailable in moneda nacional, but also because they provide the initial investment needed to engage in entrepreneurial activities. Owing to the demographics of Cuban immigration to the United States, remittances are characterized by acute racial disparities in terms of the recipients of dollars on the island. Despite the fact that recent waves of migrants have been more racially diverse than earlier ones, in both the 1990 and 2000 U.S. Census counts, approximately 84 percent of Cuban Americans self-identified as white (de la Fuente 2001, 319; Blue 2007, 57). Furthermore, Afro-Cuban immigrants are less able to send regular remittances to their families because they tend to be more recent immigrants to the U.S. and are still in the process of becoming financially stable (Blue 2007, 58).

Afro-Cubans’ historic economic disadvantages also factor into their current situation vis-à-vis private enterprise. Two of the most lucrative types of *negocios* (businesses) in contemporary Cuba are renting out rooms to tourists and driving taxis. Unlike many white Cubans, few blacks before the Revolution owned cars or lived in large colonial homes with extra rooms in tourist-friendly neighborhoods like Vedado. Hence, most do not have access to the material conditions that would allow them to convert a possession into a livelihood. Given the relative lack of access to jobs in the tourist sector, dollar remittances, and resources to start up private businesses, many Afro-Cubans are forced to try and drum up dollars illegally, that is, in the informal economy. The informal economy is made up of a wide range of activities, including more “innocuous” ones—such as selling clothes or food on the black market, providing services (carpentry, manicures, and so on), or using one’s car as a taxi—and riskier, more socially unacceptable

ones, such as hustling and prostitution.<sup>5</sup> Although geographer Sarah Blue debunks the common misconception that black Cubans are more likely than whites to participate in the informal economy, she also states that “blacks and mulattos were slightly more likely to engage in riskier (illegal) activities, such as selling misappropriated goods or hustling” (Blue 2007, 51).

Although the Special Period dealt a cataclysmic blow to the entire Cuban economy and all sectors of society experienced extreme deprivation, it hit blacks hardest due to their relative lack of access to dollars. Thus, while not an intentional goal of the Castro regimes, the solutions posed by the government to counteract the crisis—the expansion of tourism, institutionalization of a dual currency system, and authorization of private enterprise—have had the effect of aggravating racialized economic inequalities on the island.

### The Continuing Racialization of Rumba in the Era of Cultural Tourism

Yvonne Daniel states, “Since the Revolution of 1959, rumba has emerged as a symbol of what Cuba stands for among its own people and what Cubans want the world to understand when the international community envisions Cuba and Cubans” (Daniel 1995, 7). She presents an optimistic assessment of the socialist government’s elevation of rumba to the status of a national dance, which conforms to the majority of Cuban scholarship that tends to characterize rumba as a symbol of Cuban identity. Prominent musicologist Argeliers León, for example, draws a distinction between *punto guajiro*, or Spanish-derived country music, which is practiced primarily by white or light-skinned rural Cubans, and rumba, which he states has been capable of drawing together different sectors of the population and which he presents as “the generalized expression of the Cuban” (León 1984, 154; my translation). However, in my experience, rumba is still a racialized cultural tradition that not all Cubans care to identify with and which is practiced almost exclusively by blacks and mulatos. I have one Cuban friend who continually derided my choice to research contemporary rumba performance by asking me why an educated woman born in a first-world country was so interested in learning about such a lowly, “uncultured” musical practice. He posed this question to me with such frequency that I came to view his comments as representative of deeply ingrained racial prejudices toward black Cubans and their cultural expressions, even on the part of nonwhites such as this friend. Rogelio Martínez Furé, founder of

5. In Cuba the term *jinetero/a* (hustler) can be used to refer to a man or a woman and does not translate directly to “male prostitute.” A *jinetero/a* is someone who attempts to establish relationships (often, but not always, sexual) with foreigners for the purposes of financial gain.

the prestigious Conjunto Folklórico Nacional (National Folkloric Ensemble, or CFN), is one of the few prominent scholars to admit that the discursive valorization of rumba does not necessarily represent the attitudes of a majority of Cubans. He states, “Currently, rumba ‘in the abstract’ has in fact been taken up as one of the symbols of ‘the national’; but rumba ‘in its concrete manifestations,’ that which is still played in urban slums or in small rural towns, is not totally accepted by many Cubans, who continue to reject it, considering it to be ‘vulgar,’ ‘a black thing’” (Martínez Furé 2004, 142, my translation).

In her dissertation on transnational rumba and Afro-Cuban religious musicians, anthropologist Lisa Knauer (2005) emphasizes the Revolutionary government’s ambivalent stance toward rumba, highlighting the fact that rumba performance venues have long been sites of police harassment. In the early decades of the Revolution, police often broke up rumba parties and Afro-Cuban religious ceremonies in private homes (Vélez 2000; Knauer 2005). In the 1970s, when the CFN established its weekly *Sábado de la Rumba* (Saturday Rumba) event in Havana, it faced opposition from the residents of the historically affluent Vedado neighborhood, who complained about the noise and expressed concern about the event attracting large numbers of poor Afro-Cubans. Black Cuban poet Eloy Machado faced similar struggles in the 1980s when starting his bimonthly rumba event—called *La Peña del Ambia*—at the *Unión de Escritores y Artistas Cubanos* (Union of Cuban Writers and Artists, or UNEAC), also in Vedado (Knauer 2005, 542–543). Geovani del Pino, the director of famed Havana rumba group *Yoruba Andabo*, informed me that members of the UNEAC forced a temporary closure of the rumba event for a period of time in 1987, two years after the event had begun. He referred to the initiators of the closure as the “enemies of rumba,” those who held discriminatory and racist attitudes toward rumba and its participants and followers (2006). The majority of *rumberos* (rumba participants) with whom I have conducted research feel that rumba still suffers from widespread racialized prejudice within Cuban society and that the discursive valorization of Afro-Cuban traditions by state cultural officials rarely translates into practice. In addition, as will become evident, the expansion of the tourism industry in Cuba has profoundly impacted all realms of cultural production, including rumba performance, with important implications for racial politics on the island.

Vincenzo Perna (2005) and Robin Moore (2006) have written extensively about the changes associated with the legalization of the possession of foreign currency and the new lucrative relationships between Cuban musicians and foreign recording companies. However, it should be emphasized that the new economic freedoms and opportunities granted to the country’s elite *timba* (contemporary dance music) and popular music groups have not

necessarily been extended to other genres of Cuban music such as rumba and Afro-Cuban folkloric music. The government has come to understand that Cuban timba bands constitute a significant source of state income for several reasons: the widespread dissemination of their recordings abroad that draws tourists to the island, the percentage of revenue generated by their foreign tours that is collected by the *empresas* (state-run artistic agencies), and income taxes paid by musicians on their foreign currency earnings (Perna 2005, 77). Folkloric groups and musicians, on the other hand, have never possessed the same degree of earning power, mass media dissemination, or foreign popularity. For example, the director of a professional Havana rumba group once complained to me about the empresa taking 30 percent of the group's earnings for any given performance and then not following through on its responsibility to provide transportation for gigs. Nonetheless, the Cuban government's recognition of Afro-Cuban culture as a significant attraction for foreigners has created new performance and financial opportunities for folkloric musicians, both those who have professional status and those who play *en la calle* (literally, "in the street," or without an empresa affiliation).

Several scholars have written about the central role that Afro-Cuban music and religion have played in the cultural tourism sector since the 1990s (Pacini Hernandez 1998; Hagedorn 2001; Perna 2005; R. Moore 2006). Ethnomusicologist Katherine Hagedorn discusses the creation of new *Santería*-related tourist packages, called *Ochatur*s or *santurismo*. She highlights the irony entailed in a Marxist government's sponsoring of religious initiations now that *Santería* has become a tourist attraction and source of income, a seemingly contradictory move by a state that regularly harassed and imprisoned Afro-Cuban religious practitioners in the 1970s and 1980s (Hagedorn 2001, 9). Alejandro de la Fuente and Mark Sawyer underscore the contradiction inherent in the fact that while Afro-Cuban culture, music, and religion almost single-handedly nourish the cultural tourism industry, black Cubans—many of whom are the religious and musical practitioners themselves—have seen the least economic gains from the influx of tourist dollars, and many are worse off materially than before the Special Period. One of Sawyer's informants wryly states about the contradictory racial politics of the market-oriented economy, "'They have sought to make the country appear more 'European' [by hiring primarily light-skinned Cubans within the tourist industry] and at the same time utilize Afro-Cuban culture as an exotic allure" (Sawyer 2006, 110).

The primary ways in which Afro-Cuban music practitioners engage directly with the tourist economy are through professional performances (if their group has an empresa affiliation) and through teaching private music and dance lessons to foreigners; the latter technically constitutes an illegal

activity because the musicians do not pay taxes on their earnings. Based on my eight years of fieldwork in the capital, I have divided Havana's rumba events into three basic categories that I feel have constituted the large majority of professional and semi-professional performance over the past decade: community-initiated events, state-sponsored rumba events, and for-profit gigs at cabarets and nightclubs (Bodenheimer 2010). The well-known Callejón de Hamel Sunday rumba event would be an example of the first category, and the previously mentioned CFN and UNEAC events belong to the second category. However, it is the third category, the for-profit gigs, that I would like to discuss, as they have not yet received much academic attention and because they constitute a new venue for rumba performance that has emerged in the post-Soviet era of cultural tourism.

The phenomenon of for-profit rumba events, which take place in nightclubs and cabarets, appears to have arisen as a result of the expansion of the tourism sector and the dollarization of the economy. Unlike community events, which are unpaid, and state-sponsored events, which are generally part of musicians' quota of performances for which they receive a monthly salary, these cabaret gigs allow professional rumberos to earn money over and above their salaries and provide them with an immediate source of income after each show. (Musicians' monthly salaries vary depending on their classification level [as determined by the empresa] and their years of experience. For more information, see Moore 2006 and Robbins 1989.)

There are generally two ways in which performers are paid for these performances: either the group is allowed to take home the money collected at the door, or a fixed amount is agreed upon beforehand with the cabaret manager (Rodríguez Morales, September 2006). In both cases the total sum, minus the percentage owed to the empresa, is divided equally among the members. While this may seem like a lucrative opportunity for rumberos to engage with the new market-oriented economy, the amount of money each performer takes home can vary widely from group to group and performance to performance. For example, I have been at a cabaret performance where the audience never reached more than ten or fifteen people. With an average of eight Cubans to every two foreigners, the total door income would be around \$13 CUC (\$1 CUC for Cubans and \$2–3 CUC for foreigners). This would then be split among the eleven or twelve group members (including dancers, singers, and percussionists), averaging just over \$1 CUC per person, and without factoring in the percentage reserved for the empresa. On the other hand, on an average Saturday afternoon, Yoruba Andabo packs the Cabaret Las Vegas, its long-standing weekly gig, and easily takes in at least \$100 CUC. In a larger sense, however, it is important to emphasize that even successful rumba groups earn far less than their counterparts in timba bands, who play in large nightclub venues like the Casa de la Música,

charge anywhere between \$15 and \$25 CUC/person, and whose shows are well-publicized within tourist circuits.

The other main way that folkloric musicians earn dollars is by providing *clases particulares* (unofficial private lessons) to foreign students, which, despite not being sanctioned by the state, is a widespread activity. Generally, it functions as a sort of open secret: everyone knows that it is happening, but as long as private lessons do not interfere with the musicians' professional duties, they are allowed to conduct them without being harassed. Foreigners are encouraged to enroll in official packaged workshops organized by cultural organs of the government, which are the only legal way of taking percussion, song, and/or dance classes. The CFN, for example, offers annual percussion and dance workshops called FolkCuba. Many Afro-Cuban music and dance workshops are organized by foreign cultural tour operators or companies like the Bay Area-based organization Plaza Cuba, which gather a group of tourists from their home country and contract with a particular folkloric group on the island to give two-week courses. Some of the foreigners take the legal route, going through the official Cuban channels in order to organize the music and dance courses, and others have more informal financial agreements with the directors of the folkloric groups with which they are interested in working. Many foreigners interested in cultural tourism may decide to take their first trip to Cuba with an organized group, but they often return to the island as individual tourists in order to seek out music or dance lessons with particular teachers.

My trajectory is a common one for cultural tourists: I first traveled to Cuba in the summer of 2003 as a participant in a percussion and dance workshop organized by the Northern California-based humanitarian tour operator Global Exchange. It was through this program that I met my Havana percussion and song teacher, Daniel Rodríguez, who heads a rumba group, Los Ibellis, with whom I have conducted extensive research. When I traveled to Cuba on my own the following summer to conduct preliminary doctoral research, I immediately contacted Daniel for private percussion lessons. During that summer our lessons took place in the Teatro América, located in the heart of Central Havana, although most private teachers hold lessons in their homes (or in relatives' homes if they do not live in a central neighborhood of Havana) to avoid alerting authorities about their nonlicensed professional activities. In fact, on all of my subsequent research trips to Havana, my lessons with Daniel were conducted in private homes.

Musicians who give *clases particulares* in rumba and Afro-Cuban folkloric music and dance generally charge \$10 CUC/lesson, and depending on the generosity of the teacher, the classes can last anywhere from an hour on the dot to two, or more rarely, three hours. This rate is mutually

beneficial for the foreigner and the Cuban teacher: it is quite inexpensive compared to the price of private lessons in the foreigner's home country, and it allows the Cuban to earn the equivalent of a monthly salary in a few hours, thus alleviating some of the economic pressures of the dual currency economy. Often a long-term relationship is established, where the foreign student helps the Cuban teacher survive in a difficult economy and in turn the teacher provides access to restricted religious ceremonies and/or other events. Clases particulares also open up important opportunities for folkloric musicians: foreigners often recommend the teachers to friends back home wishing to take music lessons in Cuba, or in rarer cases, the foreign student is able to arrange for the teacher to get a visa to perform or teach classes abroad. In addition, while they are not necessarily a primary motivation for folkloric musicians, romantic relationships with a foreign student can sometimes result from clases particulares, which in turn could enable the musicians to leave Cuba on a marriage or fiancé visa.

In addition to paying for private lessons in dollars, foreigners often buy teachers gifts, such as food, rum, or clothes; bring them gifts from their home country; or leave behind supplies that are hard to come by like batteries, blank CDs, and cassettes, and sometimes small electronic devices like digital cameras or portable music players. While the relationships between Cuban teachers of folkloric traditions and foreign students can be characterized as mutually beneficial and often blossom into affectionate friendships, the economic foundation of the relationship cannot be overlooked within the context of post-Soviet Cuba. There is simply no way to escape the fact of economic inequality between Cubans and foreigners (even foreigners considered to be poor by the standards of their own country), and this situation sometimes leads to uncomfortable moments and uninformed expectations on the part of Cubans concerning the amount of financial help the foreigner can provide.

Unsurprisingly, there is intense competition among practitioners of Cuban folkloric music and dance to secure foreign students and the economic benefits they bring, which has led to the appearance of what Lisa Knauer terms *jineteros folclóricos* (folkloric hustlers), who congregate at rumba events in order to meet foreigners (Knauer 2005, 481). I should note that folkloric hustling is much more common in Havana than in other Cuban cities, largely because of the disproportionate number of tourists who visit the capital. Although Knauer's description of the modus operandi of these folkloric hustlers coincides with my own extensive experience conducting research at rumba events, I find that there is at times a fine line between these folkloric hustlers and professional folkloric musicians. There are distinctions between the two. For example, the former—almost invariably male and black or mulato—may feign in-depth knowledge about rumba and Afro-

Cuban religious music when in reality he only knows how to play a few rhythms. However, some professional musicians engage in behavior associated with *jineteros*, such as circulating through the crowd (when they are not performing) to sell burned CDs of the group's recordings to tourists. Knauer highlights the important role folkloric hustlers play, viewing them as "cultural brokers" (2005, 483) who provide foreigners with access to people and events not publicized within the official tourist circuit. She finds that many Cubans do not view the relationship between a *jinetero* and a tourist as necessarily exploitative, for ultimately both parties are getting what they want and need. In relation to my discussion of the racial politics surrounding cultural tourism, I would add that the lack of access to dollars is part of the reason that folkloric hustling is a racialized phenomenon. In other words, black men are overrepresented in this activity because most do not have access to other avenues, whether legal (tourist jobs) or illegal (driving taxis without a state license.). However, rather than viewing them as helpless victims of racialized economic disparities, I would argue that these men are shrewdly exploiting one of the few advantages provided by their skin color—the veneer of authenticity within cultural spaces of blackness such as rumba or folkloric shows.

Another issue related to the phenomenon of hustling is that, due to the much higher presence of foreigners on the island since the fall of the Soviet Union, rumba performance has been subjected to increased surveillance by the authorities, whose principal objective has become to protect tourists and prevent theft and solicitation by Cubans. Lisa Knauer writes about a rumba event in Old Havana that was organized in the late 1990s by community members and that began to have problems with the police once foreigners started attending. This event was not sponsored by an official institution and had an open, spontaneous format (there was no regular group who played there), leading to a more raucous atmosphere. However, in a classic display of disciplinary power as theorized by Michel Foucault (see Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983), the organizers, keenly aware of the stereotypes surrounding rumba events—heavy drinking and violence—often encouraged the audience "to counteract the negative image of rumba and Afro-Cuban culture by behaving properly" (Knauer 2005, 554). Knauer reports that the event was suspended in 2004, and to my knowledge it has not operated since then.

I also witnessed, during my own fieldwork, an example of *rumberos* engaging in self-disciplining strategies to counteract negative stereotypes about blacks' behavior at public events. In March 2007 I traveled with the prominent Matanzas-based folkloric group *Afrocuba de Matanzas* to a performance at a folkloric festival in Cárdenas, a port city in Matanzas province. The event got very crowded, people were drinking heavily, and during

the course of the performance a fight broke out. The performers asked for calm in order to continue with their performance, and one of the dancers alluded to the stereotype of blacks as undisciplined and badly behaved and implored the audience to prove this notion wrong. These anecdotes illustrate that rumba performance is still heavily imbricated with racialized notions of good/bad comportment.

### Material and Psychological Effects of the Racialization of Rumba Performance

During the nine years since I began conducting fieldwork in Cuba, I have come to understand the difficult place that rumba and Afro-Cuban folkloric performers occupy within the Cuban cultural apparatus. I have had numerous experiences with rumba groups in Havana, Matanzas, and Santiago that lead me to believe that the cultural practices associated with black Cubans are not given the same amount of structural and economic support as other musical genres like timba, that enjoy more widespread popularity within the Cuban population and whose musicians are more racially diverse. Many times I witnessed the frustration of rumba and folkloric performers and the logistical failures and mishaps they were forced to endure in terms of faulty transportation or inadequate performing conditions. Often the transportation guaranteed by the *empresa* failed to show up even remotely on time (or at all), or the venues to which the groups were sent to perform did not have the necessary conditions for folkloric performance, such as a changing room. This can present a major problem for full-fledged folkloric dance troupes such as CFN, AfroCuba de Matanzas, and the Havana-based Raíces Profundas, whose shows often include five or six folkloric dances from different Afro-Cuban traditions, necessitating several costume changes. While a discussion of the state of folkloric groups' transportation to and from their gigs may seem like a minor detail in relation to musical performance, getting from place to place is one of Cuba's most enduring social problems, which is magnified when taking into account costumes and percussion instruments.

On Thanksgiving Day in 2006, I headed to the rehearsal location of the highly esteemed Havana folkloric dance troupe Raíces Profundas in order to travel with the group to their performance in the outlying municipality of Guanabacoa for the annual Wemilere Festival, which celebrates the African roots of Cuban culture. The bus sent by the *empresa* to transport the group to Guanabacoa was scheduled to arrive at 5 p.m., which would allow plenty of time to make the approximately thirty-minute trip from Havana and for the performers to get dressed in time for their 9 p.m. performance. We waited and waited, with group director Juan de Dios calling the *empresa*

several times to ask when the bus would arrive and being told that it was on its way. Despite the group members' grumblings after a few hours that they should be allowed to go home and that this was just another example of a folkloric performance being cancelled due to transportation problems, de Dios was determined to keep waiting. Finally, the bus arrived, roughly four hours after its scheduled time and fifteen minutes after the group was scheduled to begin performing!

When we arrived, the dancers were quickly shoed into a makeshift dressing room (the bathroom of a municipal building that was ripe with the odor of urine). Raíces Profundas ended up performing a few numbers, less than a half hour in total. For the return trip to Havana, the empresa sent a smaller bus than the one in which we had arrived, and it did not have enough seats to accommodate all the members of the group—roughly twenty-five dancers and six or seven musicians—and the percussion instruments. In addition, a few people who were not members of the group were also riding on the bus, including sound engineers who needed a ride back to Havana and myself. This situation resulted in a heated argument between the local head of transportation—who stopped the bus and insisted that “only the twenty-five dancers of Raices Profundas” could ride on it—and members of the group, who tried to explain that the group was larger than twenty-five people. By this time it was after midnight, and the musicians and dancers were frustrated with what they deemed to be the *falta de respeto* (lack of respect) on the part of the organizers of Wemilere. The deeper implication of this anecdote is, I believe, as follows: folkloric musicians and dancers realize that despite the high-minded rhetoric that is commonly heard at state cultural events and festivals about the importance of folklore as the root of national culture, it is precisely the performers of these traditional practices who are treated with the least consideration. While I cannot prove that this mistreatment is racially motivated, as evident in the story below, it is significant that many performers perceive the situation in this way.

In addition to the logistical challenges that rumba and folkloric groups face in terms of transportation and performance conditions, rumba is in a relatively precarious position within the new market-oriented economy, particularly in Havana. During the fall of 2006, I came to understand the fickle nature of the political economy of rumba performance as I observed how *peñas de rumba* (regular rumba events/gatherings) could be cancelled from one day to the next, with almost no notice. This instability is characteristic principally at the for-profit gigs I described above. One experience highlighted to me not only the instability rumba performance faces in the post-Soviet economy, but also the psychological effects that a lack of institutional support can have on musicians. Los Ibellis, my percussion teacher's

group, had a weekly peña at a cabaret called Karabalí in the Vedado. In late September, the group's representative heard rumors that the cabaret was thinking of suspending its rumba events because the head of the empresa representing the club disliked rumba and did not want it performed there (Rodríguez, October 2006). In early October, Los Ibellis' peña was cancelled indefinitely, although it was not clear why. Several weeks later, Los Ibellis was back performing at a newly remodeled Karabalí and learned that the latter had closed for remodeling and not necessarily (or not solely) due to the whims of an empresa official. Thus, although this particular instance did not in the end involve a falta de respeto toward rumba performers, the fact that musicians interpreted it in this way is telling: it suggests a widespread suspicion on their part toward the state cultural apparatus and its rhetoric about the importance of Afro-Cuban culture. This distrust, which entails a realization by musicians of a contradiction between discourse and practice, may signal that the hegemonic power of the hybridity discourse is weakening. In other words, musicians (and other Cubans) may no longer believe (if they ever did) in the myth of racial democracy, and instead understand that blackness is not valorized to the same extent as whiteness within the national racial mix.

A few weeks after the temporary closure of the Karabalí, Daniel was informed that Los Ibellis's other, more popular peña at the Asociación Cultural Yoruba (Yoruba Cultural Association, or ACY), would be suspended indefinitely because a government cultural official wanted to use the space for other types of events. The decision to cancel a highly popular rumba/folkloric music event at the ACY, which is a state-sponsored religious institution and the country's most prominent official organ of Santería worship, seemed inexplicable. However, Daniel's account of the history of this peña shed some light on this decision. He stated that Los Ibellis had begun performing at the ACY almost two years prior, in 2005, and the event had originally been scheduled for Saturdays at 8 p.m. At some point the peña was shifted to Sunday afternoons, a decision Daniel feels was designed to attract fewer black people and minimize the possibility of fights associated with heavy drinking (Rodríguez Morales, October 2006). Thus, Daniel viewed the most recent suspension of Los Ibellis's event as part of a larger process of racialized marginalization of rumba and folkloric performance. A month later, Daniel informed me that despite the cancellation of his group's Sunday peña at the ACY, the manager was still calling him when he needed a group for private tourist performances. In other words, the group is still considered to be the institution's "house band" for special events. This suggests that the cancellation had nothing to do with the quality of the group's performance or a lack of popularity, but instead relates to the ways that rumba groups are subjected to the whims and racialized

assumptions of cultural officials and institutions. Incidentally, on my most recent research trip to Cuba in June 2011, I learned that Los Ibellis is once again performing a Sunday peña at the ACY.

One last vignette clearly demonstrates the ongoing lack of support and inconsistent actions taken by the state cultural apparatus vis-à-vis rumba performance in Havana. After several years of delay, in January 2010 the Palacio de la Rumba (Rumba Palace) was finally opened in the Centro Habana neighborhood of Cayo Hueso, considered to be a rumba stronghold.<sup>6</sup> At that time, I learned from a fellow rumba scholar that AfroCuba de Matanzas would be performing a bimonthly gig there. During my research trip in June 2011, I visited the Palacio de la Rumba and found the venue to be very well built, modern, and technologically sophisticated, with pictures of famed rumberos covering the walls. However, in examining the programming I found that the majority of shows advertised at the Palacio de la Rumba were nonrumba events, and apparently the bimonthly performance of AfroCuba had been cancelled long ago. On Thursday afternoons the venue showcases rap, on Saturday afternoons there is a *discotemba*—a dance club event geared toward Cubans in their thirties and forties (referred to as *tembas* in Cuban slang) where DJs play salsa hits from the 1980s and 1990s, such as classics by Los Van Van—and I also saw flyers for events featuring well-known timba groups and performers. My observations and conversations with a few people in the rumba scene led me to conclude that the only day reserved specifically for rumba at the Palacio is Sunday. I found it very hard to believe that finally, after years of delays, this wonderful new institution that was designed to showcase rumba performance was featuring barely any rumba!

The current representative of Los Ibellis spoke with me on the subject, stating that the government has not put any real money into promoting rumba performance at the Palacio de la Rumba, resulting in a dearth of supportive and paying spectators (Cruz 2011). I find that there is often no consistency for rumba events—events are scheduled and cancelled at whim, and if there is a small audience for two weeks, they cancel the event instead of building an audience by continuing to offer rumba for several weeks to truly determine if there is interest or not. In addition, it is illogical that the only day that seems reserved for rumba is Sunday, which is already the day in which some of the most popular, long-standing rumba events are

6. Lisa Knauer states that in 2002, the Ministry of Culture announced plans to build the Palacio de la Rumba, but that two years later nothing had been done to actualize this plan (Knauer 2005, 558). I lived in Cayo Hueso during the majority of my fieldwork year (2006–2007) and never heard about these plans, and thus I assumed that this was another example of hollow rhetoric from the government valorizing rumba performance. It appears that the plans had not been cancelled completely, but were merely being subjected to long delays.

scheduled. This means that the Palacio de la Rumba event is competing with peñas at both the ACY and the Delirio Habanero (a nightclub housed in the National Theater building across from the famous Plaza de la Revolución). Meanwhile, during the rest of the week there are only a handful of rumba events in Havana.

### The Situation of Rumba Performance beyond the Capital: Matanzas and Santiago

The hub of rumba activity is undoubtedly the capital, Havana, where the greatest number of rumba groups reside and where most rumba events take place. Thus, while the situation of rumba in Havana is somewhat unstable, it is even more precarious in other Cuban cities. I should also note that while there has been some research on the Havana rumba scene since the Special Period, there has been very little research on the contemporary rumba scenes outside of the capital, including Matanzas and Santiago.<sup>7</sup> Matanzas is a small city, and it presents a major contrast in many ways to the sprawling and seemingly endless geography of Havana. In addition, cultural performance within the city of Matanzas is negatively affected by its impoverished status vis-à-vis the tourism industry. For most foreigners, Matanzas city is merely a stop on the bus line from Havana to Varadero, the island's most famous beach resort, located twenty-two miles northeast of Matanzas. The city is currently characterized by a rather depressing restaurant and nightlife scene and a striking lack of tourist-oriented amenities; for example, during the three months I spent conducting research there in early 2007, both of the city's hotels were closed for repairs, and only one of them has since reopened. While Matanzas' folkloric scene is internationally renowned, and foreigners come somewhat regularly for religious purposes or to take lessons with members of the prominent folkloric groups Afrocuba de Matanzas or Los Muñequitos de Matanzas, local musicians often experience periods of tourist drought and, consequently, economic hardship.

Some musicians have suggested that Matanzas' lack of restaurants and entertainment venues is related to its proximity to Varadero, the island's most successful, and for many years its most exclusive, tourist resort. They feel that the state has made a decision not to invest in promoting tourism in Matanzas, preferring to focus its energy and resources on Varadero.

7. My 2010 dissertation is the only post-Special Period research on the Matanzas rumba scene of which I am aware. Cuban scholar Nancy Grasso González conducted research on the two principal rumba groups in Matanzas—Afrocuba de Matanzas and Los Muñequitos de Matanzas—for her BA thesis (1989), but her fieldwork was conducted in the 1980s. To my knowledge there has been nothing published on the Santiago rumba scene.

In any case, this situation forces *Matanceros* (Matanzas natives) to travel to Varadero if they want to go out dancing or to eat at a restaurant that serves more than pizza, fried chicken, or hamburgers. Although one could argue that *Matanceros* enjoy a better standard of living than many Havana residents due to the lack of overcrowding, pollution, and crime, this does not necessarily translate to more material or economic wealth. Even the musicians and dancers of AfroCuba de Matanzas, who during my research period performed a bimonthly gig in a Varadero hotel for which they were paid in dollars, rarely had more than a few dollars in their pockets at any given time.

The city of Matanzas is considered by many to be *la mata de la rumba* (the tree/birthplace of rumba), and it has a celebrated history of rumba performance dating back to the nineteenth century, particularly in historic Afro-Cuban neighborhoods such as Simpson and Pueblo Nuevo. The majority of the *cabildos de nación* in Matanzas were located in these barrios—twenty-four in Simpson and twelve in Pueblo Nuevo—and rumba parties were almost daily events (Grasso González 1989, 5). During my fieldwork in Matanzas, I also came to know the neighborhood of La Marina as a barrio with a deep history of Afro-Cuban religious practice and rumba performance and home to many famous *rumbero* families, including members of AfroCuba de Matanzas and Los Muñequitos de Matanzas. AfroCuba de Matanzas was formed in 1957 principally by musicians and dancers from Pueblo Nuevo, an association that was highlighted by the original name of the group, Guaguancó Neopoblano (Pueblo Nuevo–style Guaguancó). The founding members' main mission was to return the practice of rumba to the Pueblo Nuevo barrio, where it had declined; at that time rumba was played spontaneously and regularly only in Simpson and La Marina (Grasso González 1989, 25).

Given the rich history of rumba performance in Matanzas—also known as “the cradle of Afro-Cuban culture”—it is ironic that regular rumba is currently very difficult to find in the city. In contrast to Havana, where I worked principally with three rumba groups, my research in Matanzas was conducted with only one group, AfroCuba de Matanzas, and thus my perspective of the situation is influenced by this methodological choice. However, AfroCuba performs significantly more than other rumba and folkloric groups in the city, including Los Muñequitos de Matanzas. To my knowledge, there has not been a regular *peña* dedicated exclusively to rumba performance in the city in at least two decades. In 1989, when she wrote her thesis, Cuban musicologist Nancy Grasso González asserted that AfroCuba and Los Muñequitos de Matanzas participated in a rumba event called *Las tardes de la Rumba* (Rumba afternoons) that took place on alternating Saturdays in Matanzas, and I have heard local folkloric musicians reminisce about this

event. However, as her research was conducted in the later 1980s, it is hard to ascertain in which year the event was suspended. AfroCuba de Matanzas has a monthly event called the Tarde de Cabildo (Cabildo Afternoon), which takes place on the second Friday of each month at the Palacio del Junco, Matanzas' provincial museum. However, this event is not defined specifically as a rumba peña, but is a folkloric *espectáculo* more generally, or an all-inclusive folkloric show that presents a variety of Afro-Cuban sacred and secular traditions (see Bodenheimer 2010 for more information). In fact, this type of performance is the norm for AfroCuba de Matanzas; the group rarely performs more than two or three rumba songs in any given show (unless the event organizers have specifically requested an all-rumba performance), and they are always performed after the folkloric dances. These repertoire decisions have much to do with AfroCuba's principal artistic mission since it transitioned from being a rumba group to a full-fledged folkloric group in 1980, namely, to represent and demonstrate in the most comprehensive manner possible the diversity of folkloric music and dance from the province of Matanzas. Thus, many of the group's performances have a didactic as well as an entertainment function, and AfroCuba's director, Francisco "Minini" Zamora Chirino, often says a few words before each dance about the particular folkloric tradition being represented.

Grasso González conducted fieldwork with AfroCuba in the 1980s, and her characterization of the nature of the group's performances is strikingly similar to my own ethnographic experience, suggesting that the group has followed this formula for over twenty years. She states that, corresponding with AfroCuba's artistic mission, the group often performed during the 1980s in schools, workplaces, and *casas de cultura* (state-sponsored community cultural centers), mostly within Matanzas province, and that less common were dance and recreational events (Grasso González 1989). During my period of research with the group, AfroCuba performed regularly for various civic and state-sponsored cultural events, such as those listed by Grasso González. However, like rumba groups in Havana, AfroCuba's performance venues had also expanded in line with the new economic order on the island; they were now involved in performances for tourist-only audiences such as the Varadero hotel gig mentioned above and private performances for tourists.

Despite the negative economic effects correlated with the lack of a tourist infrastructure in Matanzas, folkloric hustling, and hustling in general, is much less pervasive than in Havana. The much smaller number of foreigners traveling to Matanzas accounts for this difference, and it also results in very different types of audiences in Matanzas as compared to those in Havana. In the capital there are a few long-standing rumba events that are discussed widely in tourist guides, such as the community rumba event

on Sundays at the Callejón de Hamel, which is often touted as *the* place to go if you want to experience “authentic” Afro-Cuban music and culture. Unsurprisingly, foreigners are often in attendance. However, the Callejón is also the only regular free rumba event in Havana, meaning that, even with the relatively heavy presence of foreigners, Cubans constitute a large proportion of the audience. In addition to the Callejón, tourists regularly attend the two other high-profile Havana rumba events mentioned earlier, the *Sábado de la Rumba* at the CFN and the *Peña del Ambia* at the UNEAC, although Cubans usually outnumber foreigners at both events. The larger point of this information is that audiences tend to be mixed in terms of nationality at the well-established rumba events in Havana, although there are other regular rumba events in Havana that are more off the beaten path and thus have an even higher proportion of Cubans. In contrast to the situation in Havana, the venues in which AfroCuba de Matanzas performs often predetermine or at least delimit the nationality of the audience members. In other words, when the group performs in small towns in Matanzas province, or for local festivals or political/civic events, the spectators are almost invariably Cuban. Conversely, when AfroCuba performs in Varadero or at a private show for a specific group of tourists, the audience is necessarily composed of foreigners exclusively. Thus, there is less mixing of Cubans and foreigners at AfroCuba shows, and at rumba and folkloric events in Matanzas in general, than in Havana. The few foreigners who do attend these events are usually in Matanzas for the purposes of academic research, individual cultural tourism—such as taking music or dance lessons with a local folkloric musician—or for religious reasons, such as being initiated into Santería or visiting their *padrinos* or *madrinas* (religious godfathers or godmothers). In terms of the racial composition of the Cuban rumba audiences in Matanzas, they are, as in Havana and elsewhere on the island, made up largely of blacks and mulatos.

The situation of rumba performance in the eastern city of Santiago de Cuba is somewhat better than that of Matanzas, which is due both to the city’s size (it is Cuba’s second largest city) and the fact that it acts as a hub for rumba performance in the east. The fieldwork I have conducted in Santiago is less extensive than that for Havana and Matanzas, as it is a more recent area of interest, but I was able to ascertain a good deal about the current situation of rumba in the eastern city in the summer of 2011. In addition, although I have spoken with musicians who assert that rumba has been practiced in Santiago since the early twentieth century, the local manifestations of the tradition have not been researched by either Cuban or foreign scholars, thus making difficult the task of providing historical background here. Although there is more regular rumba performance in Santiago than in Matanzas, it is still quite impoverished in comparison

with the capital. Furthermore, musicians expressed opinions similar to those of their Havana counterparts, asserting that rumba suffers from a lack of institutional support stemming from the long-standing racialized notions about the practice that have been described above. In relation to cultural tourism, while Santiago receives more tourists than Matanzas and offers attractions unique to the eastern region of the island—such as the annual Festival del Caribe and Cuba's most famous Carnival celebration—it is a rather long trip from the capital, and many foreigners do not have the time to venture that far east. For the tourists who do travel to Santiago, rumba is not generally at the top of their list in terms of attractions because the practice is historically associated with western, not eastern, Cuba. Cultural tourists seeking folkloric music and dance in Santiago usually want to experience more localized traditions such as the parading Carnival music groups called *congás* or the historic performance of *son*, which is offered in several venues, and thus may not seek out rumba while visiting the city.

Santiago has one well-established weekly rumba peña that takes place on Sundays at the Casa del Caribe, one of the most prominent research institutions in eastern Cuba. While I have not attended this event for extended periods of time, it seems clear that foreign spectators are a small minority of the regular audience. The rumba/folkloric group called Kokoyé, which served as the house band for this event for around fifteen years, has played a large role in maintaining and encouraging rumba performance in Santiago since the group's emergence in the late 1980s (Seguí 2011). In the past two years, the group has established a new rumba event on Saturday evenings, although the location of the event (in the Distrito José Martí) is not central or easy to access by public transportation and thus cannot serve a large segment of the rumba aficionado population in Santiago. Kokoyé percussionist Mario Seguí asserted that rumba performance has become more visible and popular in recent years in Santiago, but that he would like to see a Palacio de la Rumba built in the city in order to establish further institutional support for the practice. Unfortunately, based on my experience visiting the Palacio de la Rumba in Havana, simply building an institution designed to hold rumba performance does not guarantee that the practice will be publicized or supported financially. In addition, another rumba musician I interviewed, Ramón Márquez, head of percussion for the renowned folkloric group Cutumba, indicated that rumba performance in Santiago faced substantial challenges. He asserted that, similar to the situation in Havana, local cultural officials have often displayed prejudicial attitudes toward rumba due to its associations with criminality, and that his attempts to organize community rumba events have not been very successful (Márquez 2011).

In a larger sense, however, it does seem that rumba is enjoying a boom in Santiago at the moment—there seem to be a number of groups emerging, such as Rumbache, that currently performs at the Casa del Caribe rumba event, and Rumberos de Hoy, a group constituted largely by professional musicians from the prestigious folkloric dance troupe Ballet Folklórico de Oriente. While neither of these groups is professional—they are not represented by a state-run empresa—and institutional support of rumba is often lacking, the fact that new groups are emerging suggests that there is much popular support for the practice. Furthermore, there are a number of rumba singers and percussionists from Santiago and other eastern cities performing in Havana's elite groups, the most prominent example being Ronald González, lead singer for Yoruba Andabo and currently the most popular rumba singer in the capital. This trend indicates that rumba has outgrown its regional identity as a western Cuban (and specifically Havana and Matanzas) tradition and has become firmly established and rooted in other parts of Cuba. Beyond Santiago, the cities of Camagüey and Cienfuegos have established strong rumba traditions, as exemplified by the recent success of the Camagüey-based group Rumbatá.

### Conclusion

It seems there are contradictory forces at play vis-à-vis rumba performance in contemporary Cuba. On one hand, rumba performance has increased and become more visible in cities not historically associated with the tradition. On the other hand, it is very difficult to enjoy regular rumba in the city most identified with the practice, Matanzas. In terms of rumba's popularity, there are substantial numbers of Cubans who consider themselves to be aficionados, and yet they tend to be black and mulato. In addition, there are many Afro-Cubans who do not identify with the practice due to its racialized class associations. The issue of institutional support of rumba presents yet another irony: while folkloric musicians and dancers are absolutely central to Cuba's cultural tourism industry, they are not the primary beneficiaries of the influx of foreign dollars. Furthermore, they are not treated with the accordant respect and consideration that is assumed to accompany the high-minded nationalist rhetoric emphasizing the importance of Afro-Cuban folklore to the nation's identity. Finally, their traditions do not enjoy consistent support, publicity, or financing, and instead performances tend to be heavily policed. The flip side of the increased surveillance of rumba in the era of cultural tourism is that musicians and dancers have been able to insert themselves into the market-oriented economy by offering their services to foreigners. However, although private lessons can be lucrative, the competition among performers

is fierce and there are always more rumberos than foreigners seeking lessons. Rumba musicians' difficult economic situation is ultimately a by-product of the overall state of economic stagnation on the island since the beginning of the Special Period and its implications for racial equality. After all, if the hybrid economy has erased much of the relative material equality gained by Afro-Cubans during the Revolution, then rumba musicians—who are overwhelmingly black and mulato—are also impacted negatively.

In many ways, the complex situation of rumba performance mirrors the contradictory national conversation about race and, more specifically, blackness. The degree of acceptance of rumba as a symbol of the nation seems to serve as a measure of how much the Cuban government and Cuban citizens are willing to be identified with blackness. In terms of the government's stance on race, the Revolution still seems reluctant to recognize and address the extent of racial discrimination that exists in Cuban society—both that which was never eliminated during the Revolution and the re-exacerbation of racism since the Special Period. Popular sentiment and discourse, including continuing racialized notions about criminality and the professed (or assumed) desire by many nonwhites to lighten their offspring, is equally problematic. Given the current situation of racial politics on the island, it seems likely that in the foreseeable future, rumba will continue to be identified, and thus marginalized, as “a black thing.”

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