



CENTRAL PARK RUMBA: NUYORICAN IDENTITY AND THE RETURN TO AFRICAN ROOTS

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ABSTRACT

This essay focuses on the performance of Central Park *rumba* in the 1960s and 1970s, and its role in the formation of Nuyorican (Puerto Ricans from New York City) identity. Puerto Ricans and Nuyoricans learned and reinterpreted traditional Cuban *rumba* as their return and performance of African roots. Their search for “roots” resulted in the articulation of a Nuyorican identity reproducing their mediated memory, a *rumba* knowledge based on mechanical reproduction. What I designate as *rumba à la boricua*—the result of a mediated, hybrid subjectivity—generated a space of negotiation and contestation against the limitations of nationalism and neo-colonialism. [Keywords: Afro-Latin, Nuyorican, Puerto Rican, *rumba*, salsa, mediated memory, identity, hybridity, Central Park]

Photograph of Pe Conga's cajón drum—made by Apache—with a late 1970s pasted photograph of the Rumberos All Star: Eddy Mercado, Pedro “Pe Conga” López, Nestor “Budy” Bonilla, Miguel “Chino” Santiago, Cowboy, Anthony Negrón, José “Apache” Rivera, and David Lugo (photographer of the Rumberos All Star unknown). Photographer of Pe Conga's cajón drum Berta Jottar. Reprinted by permission.

IN HIS STUDY ON PUERTO RICAN MUSIC AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

through the 1950s, Peter Manuel (1994) analyzes how Puerto Rican borrowings, synthesis, and creative appropriation of Cuban music resulted in its transformation and/or resignification. These processes enunciate Puerto Rico's diverse nationalist articulations of cultural pride and identity through the reinvention of Cuban genres or the revitalization of traditional folklore in both Puerto Rico (*música jíbara*, *plena* and *bomba*) and New York City (Nuyorican *salsa* and *plena* as urban folklore). Manuel further argues that Puerto Rican and century-old Nuyorican cultivation and practice of Cuban musical forms have resignified Cuban music into Puerto Rican-identified practices or pan-Latino enunciations. For instance, and central to this essay, the performance of *rumba guaguanco* 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 the following pages, I will take Manuel's argument about rumba's resignification and transformation two decades later into the 1970s, when traditional Cuban rumba became the performance and articulation of a Nuyorican post-national identity, or what I call *rumba à la boricua*.¹ Thus, in this context, rumba functions as the form through which these young Nuyoricans express, mediate, and constitute their identity (Manuel 1991: 106).

Informed by the 1960s and 1970s Afro-Cuban jazz *descargas* and the ongoing salsa movement, the Nuyorican sound of rumba in Central Park was a montage of Cuban, Puerto Rican, and African American rhythms articulating this generation's hybrid cultural identity. However, unlike Cuban rumba, which was passed on from generation to generation through performance practice, since the 1940s, rumba in New York City and its Nuyorican manifestation was mostly the result of a knowledge transmitted through mechanical reproduction as percussionists learned Cuban rumba primarily from records and, later, audiotapes. Accordingly, from the late 1960s to the early 1970s, Central Park rumba became the intersection where the energy of the civil rights movement synchronized with the formation of an Afro-Boricua identity. Thus, rumba became a boricua articulation that constituted a performative nation, a post-national cultural space that functioned beyond the colonial geography and legacies of this Afro-Latin generation. Moreover, rumba became a third space: a sovereign performative nation exceeding the racial boundaries of the nation state through the performance of this Nuyorican hybrid identity. In this context, I am borrowing Simon Frith's definition of identity in relation to music, which he conceives as a simultaneous and overlapping process:

First, ...identity is mobile, a process not a thing, a becoming not a being; second, ... our experience of music—of music making and music listening—is best understood as an experience in this self-in-process. Music, like identity, is both performance and story, describes the social in the individual and the individual in the social, the mind in the body and the body in the mind; identity, like music, is a matter of both ethics and aesthetics. (2007: 109)

In this essay, I understand this “self-in-process” as also being constituted through what Deborah Pacini Hernandez (2010) theorizes as hybridity, the result of racial and cultural mixings manifested in the identities and cultural production of Latin Americans and Latinos in the United States. Beyond Latin American nationalist discourses of hybridity as the result of *mestizaje* (cultural and racial mixing), this hybrid condition produces an artistic freedom that allows Latinos to experiment with African, Native American, and European aesthetic practices (Pacini Hernandez 2010). Rumba à la boricua is indeed a musical performance constituting the layered subjectivities of those Nuyoricans born in the mid and late 1950s. Before entering into the discussion of rumba à la boricua, I will briefly describe the historical context for the performance of traditional Cuban rumba in Cuba and abroad.

Traditional Cuban Rumba

In Latin America, the word rumba indicates a social event, celebration or party. However, traditional Cuban rumba is a performance-based cultural practice formally composed of three elements: music, dance, and singing. Documented since the late nineteenth century in the Cuban provinces of Havana and Matanzas, rumba evolved within the ports and the *solares*, humble housing compounds built during Spanish colonialism. The patios of these compounds allowed for a collective social context in which rumba flourished. Contemporary rumba is usually performed with three *tumbadora* drums, the *catá* (two long wood sticks), and the *claves* (two spoons or short wood sticks). *Clave* is also the commanding rhythmic measurement to which all performers must submit. Central to rumba is the role of improvisation by the singers, dancers, and the soloist playing the improvisatory *quinto* (the highest pitch drum). The most popular rumba styles are the guaguancó, an erotic couple’s dance based on the playful competition between the two dancers. Its main characteristic is the *vacunao*, a pelvic thrust or body gesture performed by the male towards the female indicating sexual possession. The *columbia* is the rumba from the countryside of Matanzas and Cardenas, in which the participants are predominantly male, and its dance is based on the competition and the dexterity between the soloist dancers. The *yambú* is also a couple’s dance of slow, seductive mimetic moves; it is mostly performed in theatrical contexts (Crook 1982; León 1989; Orovio 1994; Daniel 1995; Díaz and Jottar 2004; Sublette 2004).

Rumba’s Routes: A Brief Introduction

The cultivation and proliferation of Cuban rumba outside Cuba can be traced to at least three different contexts: the international theater and cabaret circuit evolving from the 1800s to the 1930s; the production and distribution of recordings categorized as *rhumba*² through radio and record stores since the late 1920s; and the influence of Cuban *rumberos/as* in New York City’s public and private spheres since the 1940s.

The musical exchange and cross-fertilization between Cuban and Puerto Ricans began in the 1800s, when Puerto Rico became the Caribbean transit stop between Spain and its Latin American colonies. Thus rumba became part of Puerto Rican popular entertainment since the nineteenth-century when the Cuban *teatro bufó* presented rumba,³ *guaracha*, and *boleros* in Puerto Rico's agricultural and urban areas (Glasser 1995; Storm-Roberts 1999; Fernandez 2003).⁴ This cross-fertilization resulted in the introduction of new musical genres and the formation of Puerto Rican musical practices that combined different musical forms and instruments in an "ever-evolving collage" (Glasser 1995: 28). This practice of mixing and making music would continue in New York City's Puerto Rican rumba scene of the 1970s, the central topic of this essay.

The Puerto Rican cultivation of Cuban music continued given the close artistic collaboration between Cuban and Puerto Ricans musicians; Puerto Rican musicians were members of Cuban bands and vice versa (Singer 1982; Glasser 1995; Manuel 1994). By the 1920s, the internationalization of *salon rumba* became evident, particularly with the rise of the Prohibition Era, as well as the circulation of Havana *conjuntos* or *septetos* (orchestras composed of seven musicians) between Havana, New York City, and Paris. Havana's glamorous cabarets entertained patrons with traditional conjuntos performing son or guaracha music popularly categorized as rhumba.⁵ Their repertoire also included the arrangements of traditional rumba lyrics (for example, "Maria de la O"), sanitized rumba choreographies, and rumba uniforms, such as *batas de rumba*.⁶ The circulation of these conjuntos resulted in the so-called "rumba craze," or the Afro-Cubanismo aesthetic movement (Moore 1997).

Moreover, the twentieth-century development of mass media and United States control of Puerto Rico promoted a faster diffusion of Cuban, Mexican, Argentinean, and U.S. music to the island (Glasser 1995). From the 1920s until the early years of the Cuban Revolution, radio broadcasting became a fundamental tool in the musical exchange between Cuba and Puerto Rico. Havana's radio stations reached South Florida, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic (Moore 1995; Fernández 2003), and Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and African Americans enjoyed the diversity of Cuban musical genres through New York City radio stations⁷ (Manuel 1988).

In the 1940s, record stores in Manhattan and the Bronx⁸ 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* (1947).⁹

Elio Luis Flores Valentín de Hostos, more commonly known as "Yeyito," and many other first and second-generation Nuyoricans discussed in this essay remember their parents' familiarity with Cuban music as they listened to records of the Cuban orchestra La Sonora Matancera, while the Cuban community listened to the Puerto Rican recordings of Rafael Cortijo. As Yeyito remarked, "esas dos orquestas eran las que unian el boricua y el cubano, and both were black" [both orchestras united the boricua and the Cuban people, y las dos eran de morenos] (personal communication, 2007).

From the late 1940s to the 1950s,¹⁰ traditional rumba in New York City was performed in a variety of contexts: commercial entertainment venues such as Latin dance halls and after-hours clubs; social clubs where Cubans gathered,¹¹ the private homes of Cubans; and public areas, such as parks. In the late 1950s, Gene Golden remembers seeing traditional rumba at the Palladium's floorshow on Wednesday nights as part of the Afro-Cuban folkloric set performed by Patato, Aguabella, Mongo Santamaría, and Willie Bobo. The Club Cubano Interamericano also hosted

informal rumbas, particularly when Arsenio Rodríguez performed with his conjunto. Gene Golden remembers Arsenio for his precise execution of the quinto solo drum and his strict standards. In one instance, Arsenio expelled a drummer from the rumba circle for his bad execution (personal communication, 2010).¹² However, traditional rumbas in New York took place primarily within private homes: during social gatherings or after the Afro-Cuban religious ceremonies of Palo¹³ and Regla de Osha.¹⁴ These were the “elite rumbas” at the homes of celebrities like Patato, Totico, Mongo, Arsenio and Kike Rodríguez (Jhon Resto, personal communication, 2011).

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By the late 1950s, there was an explosion of African drum circles in public parks, and traditional rumba became the “primary genre in the root-oriented vogue” (Manuel 1994: 267). The guaguancó “was adopted as a symbol of Puerto Rican, Nuyorican, and pan-Latino solidarity, to the extent that it can currently be said to flourish on a scale at least as that of its Cuban heyday in the early twentieth century” (López, as cited by Manuel 1994: 267).¹⁵ Indeed, during the 1950s, there were several ongoing rumbas dispersed in various areas of Central Park. Golden, Milton Cardona, Frankie Rodríguez and others frequented a rumba at 110 St. near El Barrio (Spanish Harlem). Julito Collazo, Patato Valdés, Juan Dreke “Curba,” and others sat by the Bethesda’s Terrace fountain (Pedro Valdés and Migo Lewis, personal communication, 2010; López 1976: 108). By 1964, Jerry González, and other Nuyorican prodigies had installed themselves by the fountain too. Jerry González recalls playing rumba on Sundays with his brother Andy González, Nicky Marrero, Eladio Pérez, Charlie Santiago; he also remembers meeting there other musicians from the Sun Ra’s Band. “We would play all day till night till our hands bled... [these jam sessions] turned into major events; we would pass the hat, we would make enough money to go into [an expensive] restaurant [by the West Side] with a mad crew and eat whatever we wanted even with all the stares” (personal communication, 2010).

For René López,¹⁶ the 1970s was New York City’s most effervescent rumba decade.¹⁷ Paradoxically, the rumbero Pedro Morejón¹⁸ emphasizes that, during this period, the transmission of knowledge associated with “live” rumba was unavailable

to most non-Cuban musicians, since traditional rumba was still practiced within the confines of after-hours clubs¹⁹ and Cuban secular and religious gatherings.²⁰ Indeed, it was only during these private rumbas that non-Cuban musicians could learn how to dance rumba, an element of the form obviously missing from recordings (René López, personal communication, 2010).

For generational and political reasons, the Nuyorican rumberos born in the mid- and late 1950s—Yeyito,²¹ Félix Sanabria,²² Eddie Bobé,²³ Eddy Rodríguez,²⁴ Abraham “Abe” Rodríguez,²⁵ Alberto Serrano,²⁶ and the African American Kenneth “Skip” Burney²⁷—had limited access to learn traditional rumba in its New York City grass-roots context: they were too young to enter the club scene or unfamiliar with the Cuban Santería context.²⁸ Although Gene Golden and Teddy Holliday became their mentors, this younger generation had to learn rumba primarily by studying the then popular records mentioned above, in addition to Alberto Zaya’s *Guaguancó Afro-Cubano* (1955–1956), *Tambores y Cantos* (1955), *Yambú: Mongo Santamaría y Sus Ritmos Afro-Cubanos* (1958). López recognizes Santamaría’s records as the first recordings explaining the different rhythms, their significance and history. Moreover, the isolation of the rhythm sections in some of these recordings provided both “models for learning their execution...[and] an impetus to their dissemination” (López 1976: 106, 108). But two New York City productions became seminal to this generation’s acquisition of rumba knowledge: Mongo Santamaría’s *Afro-Roots* (1958) and *Patato y Totico* (1968). Both became “national anthems” for this Nuyorican generation, which continued the tradition of improving their rumba skills in their homes and in public parks and neighborhood corners throughout the city (Félix Sanabria, personal communication, 1998). By the 1970s, these young people became core participants in Central Park’s rumba scene.

Moreover, following the Cuban Revolution in 1959, the musical exchange between Cuba, Puerto Rico, and New York City ceased, as political relations between Cuba and the U.S. came to an end. With the exception of the Palladium and the Club Cubano Interamericano, most Afro-Cuban music dance halls in Manhattan closed down to the advent of the *pachanga* and salsa music explosion. Although salsa “defied assimilation to U.S. cultural and political influence” (Berrios-Miranda 2004: 167), for Yeyito, Félix Sanabria, and Eddy Bobé’s generation, salsa posed the question “Where are you from?” while rumba provided the answer “We are Afro-Latinos” (Félix Sanabria, personal communication, 2009).

Thus, with the exception of the Nuyoricans Abe Rodríguez, who worked for Totico, 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.²⁹ By 1978, other Cuban recordings began to circulate among these Nuyorican musicians. It was René López who, during a relaxation of the embargo,³⁰ brought to New York City new rumba recordings of Los Muñequitos de Matanzas, and Afrocuba de Matanzas. Bobé and his friends got fourth-generation copies of López’s recordings,³¹ memorized them and practiced their new rumba skills in Manhattan (Washington Square and Riverside Park), Brooklyn (Prospect Park), and the Bronx (Orchard Beach). In fact, every Latina/o and African American neighborhood had its own set of drummers who played Puerto Rican salsa beats, *plenas*, *bombas*, and rumba and “many rumberos did not go to Central Park because they did not need to, they were jamming at their home street corner (Bobby Sanabria, personal communication, 2010).³² “There were people carrying *tumbadora*

drums everywhere in the streets” (Pedro Morejón, personal communication, 1998). In New York “there was a drum fever... Conga drumming was the equivalent of what hip hop is now in the city. This was our way to expressing ourselves; this formed part of the Civil Rights Movement, it was a way of identifying with our culture” (Félix Sanabria, personal communication, 2010).

By the early 1970s, Central Park rumba became a concentrated version of the ongoing corner rumbas/jam sessions taking place since the mid-1950s in the various neighborhoods shared by Latina/os and African Americans. In the following section, I analyze the multiple functions of Central Park rumba for this Nuyoricán generation. Within the Central Park context, the performance of rumba articulated both a space of cultural pride and intra-racial negotiation.

IT WAS IN THE LATE 1960S
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Central Park Rumba at Bethesda Terrace (1960s-1970s)

It was in the late 1960s (the Boogaloo and Latin Soul era) and early 1970s (the beginning of the salsa revolution) that Bethesda Terrace in Central Park became the central location where Nuyoricans, African Americans, and other Afro-Latinos met at the rhythm of the drum. Paula Ballán³³ has remarked that the park’s central fountain and open plaza resembled Puerto Rico’s Spanish architecture, noting that “the summer weather allowed people to leave their closed, dark apartments to enjoy the park’s openness; people wore their best clothes—newly ironed, just as Puerto Rican dress codes of the 1950s dictated” (personal communication, 1998). Ballán remembers first generation Nuyoricans and Puerto Rican immigrants attending jam sessions at Bethesda Terrace by the early 1970s.³⁴ For Ballán, however, “it was hard to call it a rumba; Central Park rumba was a social occasion more than a musical one” (personal communication, 1998).

Moreover, Félix Sanabria has remarked that, “*moreno americanos* [African Americans] had a major impact on Puerto Ricans by bringing their drums to the park. Jazz

musicians like John Coltrane had arrived at the park with bongos and congas” (personal communication, 1998). Cecil Carter, an African-American drummer regular to the Terrace scene since 1968, recalls as many as four different drumming circles at a time playing their own variations of *Patato y Totíco* (1968) and Santería chants: “I wouldn’t call it a rumba, but more of a drum circle with more Afrocentric influences without a main singer leading basic choruses like *agua que va caer*” (personal communication, 2010). By the mid-1970s, Mayor John Lindsay had legalized the live playing of musical instruments at Central Park. Ballán has provided this description:

From the Dome Shell to Sixty-Sixth Street, the park served as an umbrella for the performance of all types of music by different ethnic groups: for instance, blue grass, classical, jazz, trios, samba, and rock. Performers even collected money by passing a hat or setting it on the grass. (personal communication, 1998)

Bethesda Terrace became the central area where Puerto Ricans, Nuyoricans, African Americans, and a few Dominicans congregated in small groups of friends, family, and lovers. Ballán remembers that Latinos also incorporated their transistor radios into the existing fountain scene, which was made up of *soneros*³⁵ with guitars, *bongoceros*,³⁶ and *pleneros*,³⁷ all practicing their musical knowledge:

You would find one guy playing his guitar and singing along with his radio, others brought different instruments like trumpet, sax, trombones, timbales From the time you walked into the park to the time you left, there was a synchronized soundtrack featuring Javier Cruz, Mongo Santamaría, and boogaloo music. Central Park was everybody’s band shell. (personal communication, 1998)

For musicians like the González’s brothers who frequented the Terrace, their musical content, form, and tastes were a reflection of their personal process of self-awareness, their identification with the “common struggles” ranging from “basic pride in Puerto Ricanness, ‘New Ricanness’ or Latinoness, to militant activism in the competition for resources and political access” (Singer 1988: 7). According to Lisa Knauer, “Cuba’s support of anticolonial struggles and a cultural policy that foregrounded African Roots made Afro-Cuban culture a ‘space’ where many Puerto Ricans and African Americans could construct counter-hegemonic and nationalist imaginaries” (2009: 143). Roberta Singer contextualizes this era’s musical production as identifying more generally with Third World liberation and pan-Latino movements (1988). And Paula Ballán framed Central Park as a place touched by larger national issues:

You need to remember the significance of the coming of age of the huge baby-boom generation that was happening during the 1960s and 1970s: the Hippie culture, anti-Vietnam War demonstrations, drug experimentation, and new technologies like transistor radios. It was about a generational rebellion. (Ballán, personal communication, 1998)

Certainly, since the 1960s, music had become the vehicle of a “new consciousness, an Afro-Boricua pride and self-esteem” (West-Duran 2005). Indeed, this was an era of Puerto Rican ethnic pride typified by both the rise of the Young Lords and the Puerto Rican Independence Movement. Thus, the regular gathering at Bethesda

Terrace was no exception; it supported the articulation of a Nuyoricán sovereign identity. While the combination of live performance over recorded music recreated the soundscape of a larger pan-Caribbean world, the fountain scene was also aurally synchronized through the eloquent voice of Felipe Luciano's Sunday radio show on WRVR, *Latin Roots*.³⁸ Ballán argues that this radio show contributed greatly to the formation of Puerto Rican pride, particularly among those second- and third-generation boricuas who did not speak Spanish. Luciano's broadcast in English was an anti-colonial stand, a voice in favor of Puerto Rico's independence from the U.S., an act of conscientization (Luciano, personal communication). Thus, for a few hours on the weekends, Bethesda Terrace became an autonomous Puerto Rican space where politics and culture were synchronized via the musical performance of cultural pride and affirmation.

Probably for those outside Bethesda Terrace's rumba scene, the sound of these drum circles became the dissonant sounds of difference. Under mainland racial politics, boricuas of African descent were already categorized as African Americans (West-Duran 2005). Accordingly, these drum circles functioned as an acoustic declaration of this generation's distinct identity; they were aural articulations in which the repetition and reiteration of these particular sounds and rhythms produced a temporal space of cultural authority and presence:

"el boricua de New York City usa esta música para identificarse como Latino ... y es una forma de decir: el Americano tiene mi país, mi cultura, pero como quiera, yo me expreso como Latino." [The boricua in New York City uses this music to identify himself as a Latino...and it is a way to say: The American has taken my country, my culture, nevertheless, I express myself as a Latino]. (Yeyito, personal communication, 2009)

Thus, the culture of Central Park was no longer determined by the ongoing gentrification process that subordinated the Puerto Rican and African American populations to particular areas in the city, but by a visible and sonorous minority faction reshaping and re-performing Central Park's boundaries and sound in English, Spanglish, and Spanish. For the dominant culture, Bethesda Terrace became an Afro-centric space of contestation.³⁹

The drum circles were also a performance of cultural defiance against a larger symbolic regime. The participants of Bethesda Terrace contested prevalent stereotypes of Puerto Rican "objectionable behavior" (Jiménez-Román 2008: 2). During the 1960s and 1970s, Puerto Ricans and Nuyoricans were still racialized in negative and stereotypical ways as a result of the media and popular films like *West Side Story* (1961). Frances Negrón-Muntaner has argued that while the film constructed the subjectivity of an entire community as criminal, it also reminded its Puerto Rican audience how their real legal struggle over "subjectivity and representation is linked to the broader issue of colonial relations" (2000: 86). Indeed, stereotypes were operative of a larger structure of physical and social oppression. Thus, as salseros fixed their experiences in their music, salsa (infused of rumba rhythms) became an expressive form of liberation and de-colonization, a movement for social change and national recognition (Berrios-Miranda 2004). For instance, album covers (e.g., Willie Colón's *El Malo*, *La Gran Fuga*, and *El Juicio*) signaled the stereotypical representations of Puerto Ricans as "delinquents" (Yglesias 2005; West-Duran 2005).

But the streets were another public arena where racialized groups fought nationwide these stereotypes. From the mid-1960s to the beginning of the 1970s, there was active resistance to the increase in claims of police brutality and the decrease of affordable housing, combined with deteriorating economic conditions in communities of color. This resulted in a series of nationwide riots not only in African American communities, but in Puerto Rican neighborhoods⁴⁰ in New Jersey and in Chicago (Santiago-Valles and Jiménez-Muñoz 2004: 96). As Louis Desipio has stated, “The Chicano and Puerto Rican civil rights movement put Latino needs on the national agenda and laid the foundation for the creation of a pan-ethnic Latino politics” (as quoted in Santiago-Valles and Jiménez-Muñoz 2004: 441). But in New York City’s Central Park, the tumbadora and the bongo drums (central to the percussive African presence in Latin Jazz, Latin Soul and salsa) became the matrix between Nuyoricans and African Americans. As Gene Golden recalls, “our common concern was our love for Afro-descendant drumming traditions” (personal communication, 2010).

Within this larger socio-political context, the drum circles at Bethesda Terrace provided a multi-ethnic and multi-racial space in which the layered performance of Afro-Latino/a sound (rumba, salsa, bomba, plena), articulated a visible “black and proud” identity not only in opposition to prevalent U.S. racial politics, but also against prevalent Puerto Rican elitist discourse that privileged Puerto Rico’s Spanish roots. Indeed, Nuyoricans were caught between Puerto Rico’s “myth of race-free color blindness and the reality of anti-Black racism” (Jiménez-Róman 2008: 3). Félix Sanabria remembers growing up with African Americans in the projects and how Nuyoricans were taught to discriminate against them in the name of “staying with your own people.” However, located on the same socio-economic level as African Americans, Nuyoricans and Latino youth in general “developed a multiethnic consciousness” (Opie 2008) and appreciation, resulting in their identification with their neighbors:

When you are living on the same floor, when you start liking the girls, when you start playing ball with the guys, you are in the same classrooms together, you realized that Afro-Latinos and Afro-Americans represented two branches of the same tree, after a while ... it is hard to tell the difference from one to the other ... and all these branches have grown out of the same living conditions. And when you are poor, you are not going to look at your neighbor and say ‘because you are black, yo! If you are in the same boat, maybe we ain’t the bad guys, maybe the guy that is charging us so much rent is the bad guy ... and you come together to fight for the same. (Félix Sanabria, personal communication, 2010)

From the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, the drum circles at Bethesda Terrace were aurally connected through the diverse sounds of dissidence: the anti-colonial voices of salsa and Felipe Luciano emanating from his radio show, and the sounds of the Afro-descendant drum, all synchronized with the Civil Rights Movement. Furthermore, there were those like Ballán who identified politically with these causes, making evident the heterogeneity of this contact zone.

Over the weekend, Bethesda Terrace articulated what can be understood as a performative nation operating within, and beyond, the confines of an ongoing colonial project.⁴¹ Bethesda Terrace recalls Homi Bhabha’s distinction between the “pedagogical and the performative” nation. Bhabha defines “nationness” as a cultural

construction, as a form of textual and social affiliation, and as “a form of living the locality of culture” on temporal, rather than on historical-linear-basis. The nation functions between its narration (often metaphoric) and its symbolic power (1994: 140). According to Bhabha, there are internal contradictions in the production of the nation as narration, in the narratives of the “social imaginary of the nation-people” (1994: 152). Thus, the nation is narrated via the pedagogical and the performative; and there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative” (1994: 145). The pedagogical imposes accepted modes of behaviors and spatial practices on subjects, while the performative allows those subjects to resist the above limitations (1990: 297).

It may be claimed that within the context of Bethesda Terrace’s drum circles, the embodied practices of identity formation and affirmation by these musicians articulated a performative nation interrupting, if not contesting, the totalizing boundaries of the colonial (political) and the symbolic (representational) narratives in both: Puerto Rico and the U.S. While citizenship did not guarantee either voice or rights for these racially marked and therefore visible Nuyorican constituents, Bethesda’s performative nation produced, through the performance of sound, a sovereign temporality, a cultural authority based on cross-identifications and negotiations at the linguistic, cultural, political, and racial level between Latino/as—Puerto Ricans, Nuyoricans Afrodescendant and not—and between Latino/as and African Americans.

Central Park Rumba Bench: Setting Down Roots

By the mid-1970s, the rumba was accorded a new location on the West Side near the Bow Bridge, by one of the park benches facing the idyllic, nineteenth-century landscape framing the Dorado and Manhattan buildings. Two unrelated reasons were behind this development. First, people had started to organize their music *before* arriving at the park, forming ready-made groups that functioned differently than the spontaneous drum circles at the Terrace. Second, and most importantly, under pressure from local residents, the Parks Department began a series of “restorations” that fenced off Bethesda Terrace’s area, effectively keeping people away from the fountain. Nevertheless, those committed to the music continued the rumba tradition on the Park’s west side.

There are different origin narratives concerning this new rumba site. Some remember the Jewish-American Morton Sanders,⁴² with John Amira⁴³ and the African Americans John Mason,⁴⁴ Daffy Coleman, and others as choosing this particular bench to sit on while they played; however, some have argued that they mostly performed African music with a Latin flavor (see also Hiss 1976: 41). Others credit the Rumberos All Star, the first Nuyorican rumba ensemble in El Barrio for performing the first traditional rumba in this lake area.⁴⁵ By the late 1970s, Cuban rumba had become the official purpose for gathering. As in Cuba, music and socializing overlapped in the performance of traditional rumba in Central Park. Chatting, eating, and making new connections took place on the grassy area where drinks and food circulated, but the purpose of the gathering was also part of a larger project: the search for a shared African heritage.

In the 1970s, Puerto Ricans and Nuyoricans renewed their interest in the history of Puerto Rican, Cuban, and African traditional music forms (Singer 1982; Manuel 1994), which meant a return to their roots. However, the rumba was now no longer experienced over the collective listening to radio waves near the fountain; instead,

participants were connected through a collective live performance with tumbadora drums. Ballán remembers that tumbadoras (or conga drums)⁴⁶ replaced portable radios and wind instruments, and that Puerto Ricans began to show off their Cuban rumba skills learned at home by listening and memorizing the available records of Cuban rumba in the U.S. But one may ask, why did performing rumba (rather than bomba) constituted a return to these young Nuyoricans of their African roots?⁴⁷ Yeyito and Félix Sanabria remember the experience of learning bomba and plena as almost impossible.⁴⁸ As will be discussed below, this generation was caught between Puerto Rican racial imaginaries (based on Spanish and then U.S. colonialism) and Puerto Rican nationalist discourses of authenticity.⁴⁹

Puerto Rico's racial politics—a legacy of Spanish colonialism—continued to marginalize any form of Afro-Puerto Rican cultural expression: “[E]stamos hablando de música de negros, hay puertorriqueños que no quieren asociarse con ese tipo de música de negros aunque sean negros” [We were talking about black music, and there are Puerto Ricans who don’t want to be associated with this type of music even if they are black] (Félix Sanabria, personal communication, 2010). Furthermore, the U.S. erasure of Puerto Rican and Afro-Puerto Rican culture resulted in the lack of institutional support for traditional bomba and plena recordings. Although during the 1950s, there was a plena revival in New York City, which helped Puerto Ricans to “overcome their regional divisions” and racial tensions (Lipsitz 2007: 215–6) the existing bomba records by Cortijo and Mon Rivera had been “Cubanized” and were “farther removed from the genre’s roots.” By the 1960s, the popularity of Cortijo was in decline (Manuel 1994: 260).

IN THE CENTRAL PARK RUMBA, THE CIRCLE ALSO BECAME THE SPACE TO ACOUSTICALLY NEGOTIATE THIS GENERATION’S LINGUISTIC, RELIGIOUS, AND RACIAL HETEROGENEITY.

Ironically, while traditional bomba never achieved the status of national music in Puerto Rico, and was disappearing from the cultural practices of working-class Puerto Ricans in New York (Manuel 1994: 258), by the 1970s, bomba was becoming a sign of Puerto Rican cultural nationalism and authenticity in New York. However, many of the nationalists did not want to teach bomba nor plena to Yeyito’s friends because Nuyoricans were not considered “authentic” Puerto Ricans (Yeyito, personal communication, 2009).⁵⁰ Eddy Rodríguez also remembers the tensions between Puerto Ricans from the island and those from New York City, who were, and still are, cast as assimilated, inauthentic, and different from those from the island (personal communication, 1998). Moreover, those Nuyoricans not fluent in Spanish felt further alienated by language barriers (Flores 1993, 2000; Rivera 1996, 2001). Thus, cultural nationalism functioned as “the dismissive rhetoric of assimilation and cultural



Central Park rumba (1980s). Photographer Hazel Hankin. Photograph courtesy of City Lore. Reprinted by permission.

instrument for national survival and expression” (1976: 107). In the Central Park rumba, the circle also became the space to acoustically negotiate this generation’s linguistic, religious, and racial heterogeneity. The sound of the drum became the common language crossing internal boundaries: some musicians were Catholic and uninterested in the Afro-Cuban religions of Regla de Ocha or Palo Monte. Some individuals favored Puerto Rico’s independence, others didn’t. Furthermore, not all Nuyorican rumberos were Afro-descendant. However, being racially mixed, most of them identified primarily as belonging to the African diaspora, as “black,” or as Afro-Latino. Indeed, rumba became an alternative third place that affirmed, as Maribel García Soto⁵¹ has observed, the African presence within Puerto Rican culture (personal communication, 1999).

For this Nuyorican generation, traditional rumba functioned as the source to express their identification with Africa, whether they were black or not. For instance, Yeyito’s relationship to rumba’s Afro-descendant roots complicates an identification with “blackness” as purely racial. Yeyito, apparently not an Afro-descendant himself, argues that part of his identification with Afro-descendant drumming comes from his identification with Taíno⁵² drumming culture (personal communication, 2009). Ironically, his identification asserts Puerto Rico’s Taíno ancestry as one in solidarity with African Americans and functions contrary to Puerto Rican nationalist discourses and their “recreation of the indigenous past” as “the denigration of the ‘third root,’” or African culture (Duany 1999: 32). In this context, drumming becomes a political paradigm and praxis, a post-colonial claim against the erasure of Afro-descendants by way of Spanish and U.S. colonialism.⁵³ Traditional Cuban rumba provided a common musical paradigm that exceeded the territorial, national, and ideological features of this racially and linguistically diverse group. Rumba in Central Park became a post-national cultural performance that resisted Puerto Rico’s Eurocentric racial politics as well as nationalist claims of authenticity while claiming a larger Afro-diasporic identification. Interestingly, the performance of rumba as “roots” conversely articulated the performance of a hybrid Nuyorican identity.

Rumba à la Boricua: Performing a Hybrid Identity

By the late 1970s, Central Park rumba’s core group was Eddie Bobé, Félix Sanabria, Eddy Rodríguez, Abraham Rodríguez, Alberto Serrano, Héctor “Cholo” Pérez, Yeyito, the African American Kenneth “Skip” Burney, the Dominican-York Jesús “Tito” Sandoval, and the Jewish-Americans: Paula Ballán, Morton and Mark Sanders. Just as Cuban rumba had been transformative in providing an aural space through which this

genocide that has effected the glaring omission of Puerto Rican life in the United States from the historical record” (Flores 2000: 52).

On the other hand, López argues that the ongoing city rumbas (street drumming) channeled the community’s creativity with “familiar antecedents in Puerto Rican and Caribbean cultures, objectively constitut[ing] an

Nuyorican generation could claim their African ancestry while rejecting colonial and neo-colonial racial economies, the boricua cultivation and assimilation of this form transformed rumba into something else. Rumba had become a site of experimentation and the constitution of a boricua hybrid subjectivity.

In their performance of rumba, this generation re-created their everyday intercultural experience. Their close contact with African American music (blues, bebop, and funk) and their bilingual/bicultural experience had created what I call “rumba with a difference,” or rumba à la boricua. Rumba à la boricua was a hybrid cultural manifestation claiming both New York City and African roots within a larger African diaspora. Hybridity, “as an in-between site of enunciation” (Washburne 2008: x), produced their rumba sound, unique to their own “in-between” existence as Nuyoricans: “We are hybrids and we have the license to experiment; for instance, I might sing a columbia in a *jibaro* singing form...” (Eddie Bobé, personal communication, 1998).⁵⁵

With this statement, Bobé also points to a Nuyorican form of making music that fits into a historical tradition of incorporating different musical forms in one song (Glasser 1995). Like salsa, (Quintero, as cited in Santos-Febres 1997: 178) rumba à la boricua was a hybrid form primarily based on the improvisation⁵⁶ and the new combination of different musical forms; some Nuyorican rumberos would use traditional rumba guaguancó or columbia rhythms with different improvisational styles, or they would use salsa *montunos* for rumba ones. Although rumberos like Yeyito were “trying to emulate the truest [rumba] style, exactly note to note (personal communication, 2011), a rumbero from Cuba described the sound of this generation’s rumba as a *rumba-mambo*: “they would perform a mambo rhythm in the tumbador, the rumba rhythm in the *tres golpes*, and a free-style quinto outside the clave’s measurement” (personal communication, 1998).⁵⁷

By 1978, the older generation of Central Park drummers had stopped going to the rumba at the bench. According to Félix Sanabria, the innovations of his generation had changed the rumba scene because they “represented the merg[ing] between the Cubans and the Nuyoricans, the black New Yorkers and the New York City Dominicans” (personal communication, 2002). In fact, they were creating a hybrid style that juxtaposed the diverse rhythmic influences of a larger Afro-Latino diaspora while developing new musical skills.

RE-INSERTING THE SINGING VOICE INTO THE RUMBA FURTHER CONTRIBUTED TO THE HYBRIDITY OF RUMBA À LA BORICUA; THEIR VOICE WAS MULTILINGUAL.

Eddie Bobé identifies his generation with the ability to sing while playing multiple drums.⁵⁸ The songs varied from one rumbero to the next: “Each of them had their own version,” says Bobé. He and Alberto Serrano used to visit López, who by the late 1970s had private home rumbas and jam sessions with Bobé’s earlier generation of Puerto Rican and Nuyorican musicians: Jerry González, Andy González, Frankie Malabé,

and Ray Romero.⁵⁹ According to Bobé, López had never seen Bobé and Serrano's different styles, Serrano could play four tumbadoras while singing in duo with Eddie: "The generations of drummers before and after us didn't do what we did; we played and sang simultaneously, we improvised with our hands and our voices The whole family applauded us when we finished!" (personal communication, 1998).

Re-inserting the singing voice into the rumba further contributed to the hybridity of rumba à la boricua; their voice was multilingual. For instance, Abraham Rodríguez sang rumba in Spanglish and English, in a doo-wop swing in Central Park. In other words, rumba à la boricua was a hybrid form, a way of improvising with their cultural and linguistic skills enriched by their knowledge of rhythms and musical accents reflecting their growing experience as part of the African diaspora.

The generation's search for its African roots resulted in hybrid experimentations of making both music and identity. But rumba à la boricua was also the result of the acquisition of rumba knowledge through mechanical reproduction. While Afro-Cuban tumbadora drums had replaced transistor radios, the performance of rumba à la boricua was primarily the result of a mediated memory, the memorization of traditional Cuban rumba from cassette tapes.

Mediated Memory

Contrary to traditional Cuban rumba,⁶⁰ which was transmitted through direct observance or practice, rumba à la boricua reproduced the sound of a mediated memory based on mechanical reproduction. For this new generation of rumberos, the understanding of rumba—and the re-articulation of that understanding through performance—was a direct result of life experience. Bobé and his Nuyorican friends were products of a hybrid upbringing that combined the experience of New York City's public spaces (the parks, housing projects, subways, dance clubs, and the streets) with that of a private, more culturally specific Latino/a environment in which *boleros* and *arroz con gandules* elicited a collective cultural memory and continuity. But exactly what did it mean to have learned rumba from audiotapes? What does it mean to embody the sounds of mechanical reproduction?

During the mid-1970s, Pedro Morejón realized that these rumbas were jam sessions mimicking classic rumba records. He observed that the singers had a limited repertoire, and the rumba's tempo was drastically faster than in Cuba affecting the cadence of the music and the singers.⁶¹ Indeed, the performance of mediated memory had a different swing, but not less feeling. Nevertheless, rather than, rather than focusing on the "missing" elements of rumba à la boricua, I am interested in its generative aspects, in the affective and social relations, "the formal unity," the "ties of affiliation and affect," and "the playful diasporic intimacy that has been a marked feature of transnational Black Atlantic creativity" (Gilroy 1993: 16). Whether rumba recordings are adequate substitutes for the transmission of a live, evolving form, or not, is beyond the scope of this paper.

Indeed, a number of scholars have already argued about the complicated role of technology in the promotion of traditional practices. Philip Auslander, for instance, is critical of the valorization of the "live over the mediatized," and has questioned the importance of liveness in performance, an ideology "central to contemporary Performance Studies." Instead of opposing the integrity of live performance with technical mediation and reproduction, "liveness and mediatization must be seen as a relation of dependence and imbrication"⁶² (1999: 53) as there is no performance outside of mediation (1993: 40).⁶³ Peter Manuel (1993) has discussed the use of "devotional cassettes" in South Asian religious practices, not as a competitive substitute but as



The Central Park Rumba, 1980. Seated from left: Paula Ballan, Manuel Martínez “El Llanero,” Kenneth Burney “Skip,” and Alberto Serrano; standing from left: Israel, Nick Chavarria, Eddy Rodríguez, Félix Sanabria and Eddie Bobé. Photographer unknown. Photograph courtesy of Félix Sanabria. Reprinted by permission.

a means of reinforcing faith. Andrew Murphie (1990) also argues that technology does not necessarily substitute culture; rather it re-orders and restructures experience.

But if technology has the potential to organize experience and individual performance, how do we escape from technological determinisms? This generation reproduced, in their distinctive music innovation, a difference based on the recycling of the personal (code-switching and code-layering) in relation to the collective (the drum circle, their cultural memory, and the aesthetics of the circum-Atlantic). These mediated memorizations and rehearsals of taped sound resulted in the performance of a repetition with a difference: rumba à la boricua. As performers, the musicians became producers composing via historical memory sampling, a free-style hybrid aural form and identity that shared more with Afro-diasporic styles of enunciation like montage, and collage, than with mere imitation or mimicry. In this context, to remember is to embody historical knowledge. Rumba à la boricua is to perform rumba not as the representation of memory but rather as the embodiment of a mediated memory. In this sense, performative memory functions within Taylor’s *repertoire* (2003), the embodied practices that constitute the transmission of knowledge.

Conclusion

Historically, Cuban rumba itself is a hybrid form, a synthesis created during the late nineteenth century by Yoruba, Congo, and Carabalí slaves, freemen, and their descendants, coming together to play music and socialize on Sundays. Thus it could be argued that the hybridity nurtured in Bethesda Terrace, resulting in rumba à la boricua, mirrors its Cuban counterpart. As Fernando Ortíz (1963) argued in his theory of transculturation, new socio-economic conditions not only transform existing patterns of production, but create new intercultural dynamics. In the Cuban context, one of the cultural syntheses of these dynamics was rumba; in New York

City, rumba à la boricua. As Deborah Paccini has stated, there is nothing exceptional about hybridity within Latin/o American racial and cultural imaginary. Indeed, the hybridity of rumba à la boricua functioned as an in-between space of enunciation, not in favor of whitening, nor about racial blindness, but similar to what Flores and Jiménez have theorized as a “triple-consciousness,” a multidimensional social experience and optic that evolved in the intersection of being “Latinos, Black and U.S. American” (2009: 321).

Furthermore, rumba à la boricua illustrates how transculturation is an ongoing process. In this case, transculturation proves itself to be “in the making” (Taylor 1991). Thus, it becomes a contemporary articulation of a performative memory resulting not only from transmission through mechanical reproduction, but also from a montage of colonial experiences; the participants reinvented themselves in the face of a history of colonialism and contemporary neo-colonial experiences that positioned them as colored, second-class U.S. citizens. For both communities, the Cuban and the Nuyorican, rumba in New York City functioned as a third space demarcating their common historical memory, as well as their conscious resistance against those histories.

The 1960s and 1970s rumba à la boricua produced by Nuyoricans and Puerto Ricans, rather than being pure assimilation or appropriation of Cuban rumbas, reflects a number of historical and contemporary relationships within a diasporic Afro-Latino/a memory and imaginary. First, rumba à la boricua reflects a common Caribbean history of colonization through the continued use of Spanish language and references to *Tiempo de España* (the era of Spanish colonization). But, rumba in New York City reinforced, and re-structured, the African presence of Puerto Rican culture. In this sense, rumba à la boricua defies the late 1960s and 1970s hegemonic Puerto Rican discourses, the nationalist narratives of mestizaje that privilege whitening (*emblanquecimiento*). Second, rumba à la boricua became an elaboration of the political and cultural bond with African Americans. After all, Nuyoricans are seen not only as Spanish or Taíno Indians, but also as black. As Eddy Rodríguez explains: “rumba in the U.S. is to the boricuas what blues is to African Americans. Rumba is the Nuyorican Soul” (personal communication, 1995).

Finally, rumba functioned as a post-national space—neither in Puerto Rico nor the U.S.—but rather as a sovereign *afro-boricua* experience in New York City, composed of working-class, racialized Nuyoricans: the children of Operation Bootstrap and the subsequent Civil Rights Movement. In the 1970s, rumba provided a space of negotiation and affinity, recognition and possibility, in the making of a Nuyorican subjectivity.

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NOTES

¹ While *boricua* means “Brave Lord” and the word derives from Borinquen (Land of the Brave Lord), the pre-Columbian Arawak name of the island (Santiago 1995: xviii), my use of the

term *boricua* here refers to those Nuyoricans who identify with an anticolonial, pro-indigenous, and Afrocentric ideology; thus differing from existing uses of the term by the Puerto Rican government and the nationalist movement on the island which favor the indigenous “root” in order to erase Puerto Rico’s African roots (Duany 1999). Moreover, “rumba à la boricua” is not entirely the result of this Nuyoricans generation’s intention to perform traditional rumba in a Puerto Rican way. For instance, some may argue that salsa is Cuban music à la boricua, the boricua interpretation, or re-arrangement of Cuban music. In this context, rumba à la boricua signals the political significance of performing rumba as a Nuyoricans articulation of cultural pride connected to both: their hybrid upbringing and a larger African Diaspora. Although the Nuyoricans generation referred to in this essay is bilingual, I use the English term “Afro-Latin” (as supposed to Afro-Latina/o) to avoid the gender specificity of Spanish, and to acknowledge the centrality of U.S. language and racial politics in the formation of Nuyoricans citizenship and subjectivity.

² Although the music in these recordings was labeled rumba or rhumba; in reality, it was traditional *son* music. Ignacio Piñero was one of the major contributors of these rumba-into-son adaptations with interpretations like “Donde andabas anoche” (René López, personal communication, 2011).

³ Glasser (1995: 23) discusses the relevance of Cuban rumba in the Puerto Rican cultural repertoire and situates two types of rumba performances in the 19th century: the traditional Cuban practice of “clave” (the *guaguancó*’s predecessor form performed by *coros de clave* musical associations), and those salon rumbas performed in the burlesque’s *teatro bufo* tradition (Glasser 1995; Lane 2005).

⁴ Cuban musicians have performed in New Orleans since the 1800s, when jazz was born (Fernández 2003).

⁵ The Cuban *teatro bufo* brought to the U.S. performances of rumba in blackface, a topic beyond the scope of this paper (Glasser 1995).

⁶ For instance, the all-female Cuban band Orquesta Anacaona wore these *batas*, which are flamenco-style dresses.

⁷ For instance, *Revista Roqué*, inaugurated in 1924, was the first Spanish language radio program in New York (Glasser 1995: 111). By the 1940s, during the so-called Latin craze (Glasser 1995; Storm-Roberts 1999), the African American, Gene Golden, recalls two daily radio shows broadcasting Cuban and Puerto Rican music with English-speaking anchors. In the 1950s, Eddie Bobé remembers growing up listening to Joe Gains and other 1950s radio shows: “it was so strange somebody outside of the culture trying to explain to you the music; I was bummed out you know, to grow up here and find about [my] roots that way, through another perspective that maybe it is awful, maybe it is distorted, but anyway, you find your way” (personal communication, 1995).

⁸ The most popular being Casa Alegre and Casa Amadeo, both owned by Puerto Ricans, and Casa Aguilera owned by Cubans (Singer and Martínez 2004).

⁹ This LP series may be the oldest rumba recordings to date, they include a rumba columbia, a *guaguancó*, and other numbers by Luciano “Chano” Pozo, Carlos “Bolado” Vidal, Kiki Rodríguez, José Mangual, and others.

¹⁰ 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), Francisco Aguabella (1957), Eugenio “Totico” Arango (1959), Mario Muñoz Salazar “Papaíto” (1960), and the brothers Enrique and Virgilio Martí among others.

¹¹ In the 1940s, a popular rumba joint was La Moderna, a bakery in Central Harlem owned by Simon Jou, a Cuban émigré famous for the crafting of handmade tumbadoras. Mongo Santamaría,

José Mangual, Chonguito (Tito Rodríguez's drummer), and others played rumba there (Elena Martínez, personal communication, 2011).

¹² For the 1940s generation, private lessons were an alternative to learning rumba; for instance, Arsenio's brother Raúl taught Golden to play rumba, *palo monte*, and *comparsa* rhythms (Gene Golden, personal communication, 2010; Knauer 2005). Arsenio and Raúl also taught Ray Barretto to play the tumbadora drums; Joe Rodríguez took drum lessons from Uba Nieto (Machito's timbalero) (Elena Martínez, personal communication, 2011).

¹³ Afro-Cuban religion of Congolese origin.

¹⁴ Afro-Cuban religion of Yoruba origin. Julito Collazo, a central figure in the development of the Regla de Osha religion in New York, introduced Golden to these Cuban home rumbas. Golden eventually became his disciple (Gene Golden, personal communication, 2010). For another discussion about these house and public rumbas, see Knauer (2005: 198–206; 2009) and Moreno Vega (2010).

¹⁵ Golden remembers participating in these public rumbas in Harlem on 107th Street between Fifth Ave. and Madison (then known as Sunny Side), a neighborhood where he intermingled with Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and other Latino/as (personal communication, 2010).

¹⁶ López is a noted Nuyorican music historian, producer, and collector of Cuban and Puerto Rican music. In Cuba, he recorded the rumba ensembles Los Muñequitos de Matanzas, and AfroCuba de Matanzas. At some time during this period, López had regular rumbas in his own home, where his son, Renecito López Jr., learned with Many Oquendo, Jerry and Andy González, Virgilio Martí, Frankie Rodríguez, Charlie Santiago, Nicky Marrero, Milton Cardona, Nelson González, Gene Golden, Willy García, Heny Álvarez, and Ray Romero, many of them who could be considered the first generation of Nuyorican rumberos.

¹⁷ Berrios-Miranda (2004: 167) argues that the performance of rumba as an “authentic Afro-Caribbean cultural expression” stimulated the appreciation and interest of bomba in New York and in Puerto Rico.

¹⁸ Morejón, who arrived in New York City in the 1970s, used to perform with Julito Collazo, and Steve Berrios in Totico y Sus Rumberos ensemble at a club located at 113 St. and Lenox Ave. It was in this club that Totico debuted his classic rumba doo-wop “What’s Your Name,” prior to his collaboration and recording with Abraham Rodríguez (Pedro Morejón, personal communication, 1998).

¹⁹ Golden remembers a couple of after-hour clubs where he weekly performed rumba in Patato Valdés’ rumba ensemble from 4 a.m. to 2 p.m. of the following day.

²⁰ The most renowned home rumbas and ceremonies were those by the Candela family (Pedro Morejón, personal communication, 1998).

²¹ Yeyito worked in Totico’s folkloric group, and has performed with La Sonora Matancera, Machito and his AfroCubans, and Johnny Pacheco. He was responsible for introducing this group to Central Park rumba.

²² Sanabria is a priest of Ifá, Osha and Olu Batá (owner of the sacred batá drums). He was a founding member of the rumba ensembles Chévere Macún Chévere (1980) and Los Afortunados (1985), and he performed with Lázaro Ros and Celia Cruz. Sanabria was a direct disciple of Orlando “Puntilla” Ríos, a master drummer and priest in the Regla de Osha and Abakuá Afro-Cuban religions. Puntilla arrived in New York City in 1980 and became a central figure nationwide, as he taught the religious batá drumming and singing to most of this generation of drummers: Eddy Rodríguez, Abraham Rodríguez, and Kenneth “Skip” Burney. Gene Golden also belonged to Puntilla’s religious genealogy.

²³ Bobé is a jazz musician who has performed and recorded with Steve Berrios and Chico O’Farrill; he is the producer of the CD *Central Park Rumba Eddie Bobé* (1999) honoring the same.

²⁴ Eddy Rodríguez is Omo Aña; he had a short but prolific career as a percussionist with Mongo Santamaría, Tito Puente, and was the first to perform with Puntilla with the full family of sacred batá drums.

²⁵ Abe Rodríguez is a Santero and Omo Aña; a member of Grupo Folklórico Experimental Nuevayorquino; toured for over 20 years with Puntilla y Su Nueva Generación, and Totico y Sus Rumberos, with whom he recorded the hit single “What’s Your Name?” He has also recorded with Daniel Ponce, Celia Cruz, and Ray Santiago, among others.

²⁶ Serrano is an Olu Batá, and a master drummer and craftsman within New York City’s folklore scene, a disciple of Tommy “Papa Caballo” López and Phillipe García Villamil. He worked at Skin on Skin, a shop specialized in the hand made production of tumbadora and batá drums owned by Jay Bereck. Serrano also toured extensively with Héctor Lavoe and Eddie Palmieri and was a member of Puntilla’s ensemble Nueva Generacion, and Sanabria’s Los Afortunados. Serrano’s recordings include Orquesta Salomé (1983), Son Primero (1994), and *Central Park Rumba Eddie Bobé* (1999).

²⁷ Burney is a Santero and Omo Aña; he inherited Puntilla’s consecrated batá drums and has performed with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra and Miles Davis. He is currently finalizing his new album *Erú Chambo*.

²⁸ This group of musicians met in the early 1970s at Michael Kramers’ home, where they rehearsed their rumba every Wednesday. This generation is particularly important because, as Omo Aña priests, they became the bridge and direct source of secular and religious knowledge to the next generation of Afro-Latinos of Puerto Rican, Dominican and Cuban descent; these youngsters are the current (2010) practitioners in the latest boom of Afro-Latino/a urban folklore in New York City. For more about New York City’s urban folklore see Rivera (2010a, 2010b).

²⁹ In retrospect, these young rumberos give equal importance to the Grupo Folklórico y Experimental Nuevayorquino recordings characterized by a strong rhythm section performed with a combination of batá drums, tumbadoras, bongos, and timbales. “It offered us a glimpse as far as what direction the New York folklore scene was going” (Félix Sanabria, personal communication, 2010).

³⁰ In 1978, the U.S. government relaxed the economic embargo, allowing U.S. citizens to travel to Cuba for cultural and humanitarian reasons.

³¹ For the discussion of René López and Andy González as music collectors and their influence in the music community process of conscientization, see López (1976: 107). Since the late 1990s, there has been a renaissance of an Afro-Latino/a urban folklore in New York City cultivated by the youngest generation of Nuyorican, Cuban, and Dominican-York musicians performing the music and dances of the Cuban Santería, the Dominican and Haitian *palos*, and the bomba and plena. For this generation of young *folkloristas*, analog and digital media—from videotapes, to mobiles, and YouTube—are central tools in their tracing, learning, production, and dissemination of traditional knowledge.

³² For instance, there were drum circles in Williamsburg, Brooklyn—where Eddie Bobé and Alberto Serrano were from, in the Lower East Side and in Hell’s Kitchen—where Abraham Rodríguez lived. There was a band on 123rd Street and Amsterdam Ave., known as San Juan Hill (Félix Sanabria, personal communication, 2009). Los Rumberos All Star mentioned above, (in addition to Eddie “Sweetback,” Rocky and Rafael “Nene” Cascuo) were from E.119th and 2nd Ave. (Pedro Luis López, personal communication, 2010). One of the most popular rumbas was Armando Costales’ at W.166 St. and Amsterdam Ave. In 1972, inspired by the tunes of Carlos Santana, Armando, his brother Gustavo, Willy Marín and others created the Super Mota ensemble. They performed a fusion of Latin jazz and rock with rumba rifts in the neighborhood’s schools. In the 1980s, Armando re-located to W.182 St.; by the 1990s, celebrities like Los Muñequitos de Matanzas visited Armando’s street rumba and Félix “Pupi” Insua became a close mentor until 2001 when Armando passed away (Gustavo Costales, personal communication, 2011).

³³ Ballán is a Jewish-American folk singer and music-festival producer. She grew up in the South Bronx, and went to Hunter College of the City University of New York—and Central Park became her backyard. From the mid-1960s to the early 1990s, she was a regular on the Central Park rumba scene. In 1985, she funded the New York City rumba ensemble Los Afortunados with Félix Sanabria and Manuel Martínez Olivera “El Llanero;” they performed nationwide.

34 These jam sessions were also part of two simultaneous ongoing traditions: the Afro-Latin jazz descargas influenced by Cachao y su Combo recording *Cuban Jam Sessions in Miniature* (1957) and the FANIA-style salsa movement. Indeed, the salsa “way of doing” music included a montuno section based on an improvisation also informed by Afro-Latin jazz descargas (Storm Roberts 1999; Fernández 2003).

35 Musicians specialized in the performance of son music, originally from Cuba but internationalized since the 1920s.

36 Bongó drum percussionists.

37 Musicians specialized in the plena, an autochthonous Afro-Puerto Rican working-class musical tradition, based on competitive singing and the use of hand-drums known as *panderos*.

38 In an interview with Ray Vega, he states that during the 1960s and 1970s, radio was his main connection with Latin music, particularly radio WADO and WRVR. Vega describes how the Sunday’s *Latin Roots* show (hosted by Felipe Luciano, co-founder of the Young Lords, member of the Last Poets) covered “the whole spectrum of being a New York City Nation, whether it was politics, music or the arts.... He made everybody aware in the listening audience that everything was connected in one way or another” (Bernotas 1997: 18). Paula Ballán also argues that the 1977 miniseries TV show *Roots*, was an inspirational source of identity, “whether Alex Haley [author] was a fraud or not” (personal communication, 2009).

39 Abe Rodríguez reports that the organization of these drum circles were reminiscent of African drum orchestras, with as many as twenty musicians and one leading drummer, all playing tumbadora drums (personal communication, 2010).

40 During the 1960s, Puerto Ricans were the “most destitute” community in New York City; in 1972, they constituted 12.6 percent of unemployment.

41 I employ here the notion of “nation” according to Edward Said’s understanding of the Palestine Nation within Israel: that is, a nation comprised of cultural practices outside the violence of state boundaries.

42 Sanders was well known for his artistic crafting of drums and *shekeres*, a percussive instrument made out of a hollowed-out gourd and covered with a net woven with plastic beads or seeds. See Hiss (1976).

43 Amira became an author and performer of Cuban and Haitian drumming.

44 Mason is the author of several fundamental books on Regla de Osha.

45 The Rumberos All Stars became popular for their innovative rumba breaks (called *cierres*), inspired by the *Papín y sus rumberos* (1954) record.

46 In the U.S. and Latin America, tumbadoras are popularly known as congas. However, conga is the name for the musical orchestra that accompanies the *comparsas* during Cuban carnival.

47 In general, the Cuban revolutionary regime has promoted Afro-Cuban folklore in order to legitimize the Communist Party’s egalitarian commitment towards the inclusion of black people, and the recognition of the nation’s African antecedents. Thus rumba has been resignified as an “authentic black” form (Daniel 1991; Knauer 2009; Bodenheimer 2010). Work needs to be done analyzing how this revolutionary discourse differs to the Nuyorican reworkings of traditional Cuban rumba as a vehicle towards their African roots. Certainly Paul Gilroy (1993) would question the embedded discursive logic of “black forms” as symbols of racial authenticity and cultural nationalism. See also Rivera’s discussion about “mythologies of liberation” (2010a).

48 In 1975, Yeyito learned bomba with Heny Álvarez (Joe Cuba’s singer); Álvarez had a bomba and plena ensemble operating at El Museo del Barrio. Nevertheless, bomba was mostly performed in special occasions such as the Fiestas Patronales. Bomba was “more elite like, you had to know people who did it privately” (Yeyito, personal communication, 2011).

49 For a discussion about the role of music in the articulation of Puerto Rican cultural nationalism, see Manuel (1994).

50 For a discussion of the racial tensions between Puerto Ricans in New York City, see Glasser (1995) and Dávila (1999). For a discussion of the implications of Spanish and U.S. colonial relations

in the construction of Puerto Rico's national musical forms, and the 1970s folkloric revival of bomba and plena, see Manuel (1994).

51 A Puerto Rican doctor and singer living in New York City.

52 Taíno originally meant "peace" in Arawak but Puerto Ricans are known as Taíno because Christopher Columbus mistakenly called them that after the Arawak used the word to greet him and his men at their first encounter (Santiago 1995: xviii). See Rivera (1996, 2001) and Jiménez-Román (2008) for discussions on race relations between Puerto Ricans and in relationship to African Americans.

53 Further analysis needs to be done regarding Yeyito's Taíno identification and solidarity with Afro-descendants, particularly in relationship to Dávila's analysis of the role of 1990s Taíno-identity revival movement of Puerto Rican activists in New York City (Dávila 1999) and Quintero Rivera's (1994) argument about the solidarity between Taínos and *cimarrones* during Puerto Rico's Spanish colonialism. For a discussion on Puerto Rican nationalism and the government's cultural and educational policies' mystification of Taíno culture as anti-colonial symbol, object, and as a "mediating symbol between the dominant Spanish and the subordinate African tradition," see Haslip-Viera (1999: 16).

54 Sandoval became a recognized dancer-instructor in both New York City's salsa and rumba scenes.

55 In Cuba, during the mid-1970s, rumba was also undergoing a series of experimentations. The "Chinitos" family invented the rumba *guarapachanguera* style while Francisco Mora "Pancho Quinto" was hybridizing rumba with batá drums into the "*batá-rumba*."

56 Borrowing from Quintero, improvisation is "a moment of instant inspiration but also a reflection of historical and musical contexts... not individual display but rather the expression of individuality in a collective endeavor..." (2003: 7).

57 Another rumbero defines rumba à la boricua as a "*rumba-conga*," a combination of rumba rhythms privileging the *montuno* (choral) section rather than elaborating the *estribillo* section, the relationship between songs in one rumba. For a related discussion about the Nuyorican and Puerto Rican unruly use of *clave*, see Washburne (2008) and Manuel (1994).

58 They learned this multiple-drum style of performance from Patato Valdés, Cándido Camero, Mongo Santamaría, and Armando Peraza, who did not sing while playing drums.

59 Some of these future professionals, such as Jerry González, Andy González, Gene Golden, and Giovanni Hidalgo, traveled to Cuba to study with master percussionists such as Changuito and Tata Güines. In 1975, René López and Andy Kaufman produced the foundational recordings *Concepts of Unity* (1975) and *Lo Dice Todo* [We Say It All] (1976) by Grupo Folklórico y Experimental Nuevayorquino, with the González brothers, Milton Cardona, Julito Collazo, Virgilio Martí, Gene Golden, and others. This recording represented the marriage of cultures and rhythms experienced by this generation (Singer 1982: 27) and made tangible the community of and collaboration between rumberos in New York — this Nuyorican generation with their Cuban counterparts. In Cuba, they became influential recordings for young rumberos and jazz players (Román Díaz, personal communication, 2002).

60 In Cuba, rumba knowledge is transmitted directly via performance practice, whether in various private and public places or as part of the masterful genealogies of rumba families, such as Los Muñequitos de Matanzas, the Aspirina, the Dreke, the Chinitos, and the Aragón. The collection or circulation of rumba tapes in Cuba was uncommon until the mid-1980s, during the early World Beat music era, and later in the 1990s, when rumba recordings entered the international music market with the Muñequitos de Matanzas' international tours, and the commercialization of Afro-Cuban folklore in Cuba and abroad. Paradoxically, the internationalization of traditional rumba opened the door for Cuban national consumption, if not through actual purchasing, at least by the circulation of recordings done by tourists coming from the U.S. and Europe, or by visiting family members and scholars from the U.S.

61 In fact, the transmission of musical knowledge via mechanical reproduction was not new. Contrary to the piano, trumpet, and brass players of the Mambo bands who learned to play their instruments in school or via private lessons, many Puerto Rican percussionists had learned Cuban percussion by emulating what they heard in records (Singer and Martínez 2004).

⁶² Auslander challenges Peggy Phelan and other Performance Studies scholars, who argue that the ontological integrity of performance is fundamentally based on liveness and presence. For Phelan (1993), the ontology of performance precisely lies in the impossibility of its reproduction, necessarily resulting in its disappearance.

⁶³ In his essay about performance-based cultures, those “pre-literate” or “marginally literate cultures,” Hibbits is critical of the Western obsession with the “visual dimension of experience,” among other things. Relevant to Auslander’s discussion is Hibbits’ expansion of his definition of media, in which he argues that “alternative media” is also “non-verbal” and “non-visual.” These media may be speech, gesture, image, touch, smell, taste, sound, and so forth, all full of meaning resulting in a “synesthetic performance culture,” in which “an act associated with one sense may be understood to also exist in another sensory dimension” (1994: 959).

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