

Quintero Rivera, Á.G. (2009). *Cuerpo y cultura: Las músicas 'mulatas' y la subversión del baile*. Madrid: Iberoamericana. 394pp.

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A work of sweepingly large ambition and encompassing—archipelagic, continental, and global—scope, *Cuerpo y cultura* offers its readers an uncommonly comprehensive examination of “the historicity of the sociocultural meanings of [music and] dance in *la América mulata*.” As its author early on announces, its aim is “to resituate [the] great contributions (of the working and popular classes) in proper... perspective” so as to bring to light the definitive “importance of [popular] dance music’s—domestic, daily—work of subversion and American [cultural] fusion.” A genuinely compelling work about the too often unspoken or unperceived yet primary contours and coordinates of identity and cultural citizenship, it is at once written with an appreciable flair, and an accessible sophistication and polish that wear their considerable heft of scholarly depth and erudition with a casual, unaffected ease.

Beginning with preliminary but essential questions of longing and belonging, mourning and subversion, bodily dialogue and dialogical embodiment, *Cuerpo y cultura* moves on to an historical exploration of the common roots of Afro-descended danceable musics in the Americas, the exchanges between and among them, and their unavoidable socio-racial transculturation through only partially European musical forms. The book’s third and principal section is then subdivided into three interlaced parts. The first of these is devoted to the late nineteenth

* Este texto constituye un fragmento del laudo del Comité de la Asociación de Estudios Puertorriqueños (PRST- Puerto Rican Studies Association) encargado de seleccionar el libro de contribución más importante a esta área de estudios (“Frank Bonilla Book Award”), otorgado a *Cuerpo y cultura, las músicas “mulatas” y la subversión del baile* en la Convención de la Asociación celebrada en octubre del 2010 en Hartford, Conn. Roberto Márquez fue el Presidente del Comité; sus otros miembros fueron los profesores Josianna Arroyo y Kelvin Santiago-Vallés.

and early twentieth century *danza*. Another examines the travails and achievements, from the late 1950s to the 1970s, of the leading exponents of Puerto Rican *bomba-plena-son-rumbón* on the island and in the United States. It concludes with an examination of salsa as the dance of migration and with the subsequent migration of salsa back to Latin America and the rest of the world.

The deliberately combined vehicle of Afro-descended popular dance and music, primarily but not exclusively by Puerto Ricans, thus becomes the occasion for a critical investigation of and overlapping reflections on how laboring-poor masses and their organic intellectuals survived, negotiated, challenged, escaped, derided, and overcome oppressive conditions. Its central chronological frame extending from the nineteenth into the present century, the book undertakes to connect the lived experience of Puerto Ricans to Afro-diasporic cultures in the rest of the Caribbean, Latin America, and to the migrations to the United States, all seen against the bedeviled, asymmetrical crossroads of Africa and Europe.

Demonstrating how these genres of performative resistance effectively transcend the received mind-body dichotomies of Eurocentric rationality by a counterposed polyrhythmic and syncopated immanent critique, the analysis similarly moves beyond the constrictions of the strictly national and “a provincial indigenism” which, as its author writes, “is centered exclusively on local culture and describes its dances and music as purely national phenomena.” His particular and (even biographically) revealing readings of, among others, coloniality, dependency theory, Western Marxism, British Cultural Studies, African American historiography, Latin American literary criticism, and Euro-Caribbean race relations perspectives, in addition, provide a still further graining and texturing accompaniment for a provocative, often playful examination of the principal leitmotifs deployed throughout the book’s historical ethno-musicology: That is, of its critically informing notions of mulatto-ness (*mulatez*), hybridity (*hibridez*), and marronage (*cimarronería*). The latter, in turn, are the lens through which Quintero Rivera reconstructs the personal histories and discographies of myriad Boricua composers, lyricists, musicians, dancers, and other performers—on the island and elsewhere—*vis-à-vis* that of their counterparts in the broader multilingual Caribbean and the wider Americas. Interwoven with meticulous contextualizations of the broader socio-political, cultural events, and social forces which invariably frame and give individual outline to these multiple sites, accounts, and realities, the result is a major, critically reinfecting and “re-centering” work of combined social, cultural, and intellectual history.

It is one of the inescapable risks of an undertaking of such encompassing reach, that the very breath, range, and overarching ambition of the book's regional, Atlantic, and global linkages may occasionally result in a possibly too summary or cursory treatment of some given local reality, contextual complexity, debated process or notion. This ultimately is the price of the ticket. On balance and in this case certainly, it was a risk worth taking and a price worth the paying.

Minor blemishes notwithstanding, *Cuerpo y cultura* is a work of preeminent originality and critical acuity, and one which exceptionally enriches the field of Puerto Rican Studies by effectively bringing to the fore crucial issues affecting and giving defining shape to our communities, cultures, and histories. Inviting us to further rethink and examine the questions it raises, its study of the centrality of the Afro-descended music of Puerto Ricans demonstrates how this very same Boricua aesthetic and performative resistance has persistently imagined and proposed that another world—a world beyond the Middle Passage, beyond the plantation, beyond racial-colonial domination, beyond social abjection, beyond capitalist exploitation and the violent uprooting of peoples; beyond tears, and beyond death—is not only possible but actually achievable.