

Why have you singled out this book as one especially urgent to make available and to make available to non-Spanish language readers?

I want to start off by saying thanks to all the people who made this possible. This translation would never have happened without funding and support. And so, the first people obviously to thank is you and Neil, right? You and Neil Roberts, the series editors at Rowman and Littlefield. As well as all the other editors at the press supported this project from the very beginning. I'm also super indebted to the outside readers Odette Casamayor, Alejandro de la Fuente, Tanya Saunders, Agustin Laó-Montes. These are people who, again, were the book's biggest cheerleaders. They supported us from the start. We also need to thank Daniel Weiner at Global Affairs at the University of Connecticut for funding the translation. And the translation, this project brought me in close contact with Karina Alma, the translator and as you mentioned before, she did a wonderful job and it was just so great to get to meet her through working on this project. Obviously, there wouldn't be an AfroCubanas book without the courageous Cuban series editors as well as all of the contributors to the book. And so I want to say that it was a pleasure and an honor for me to work with Daisy Rubiera Castillo as well as the late Néstor María Martiatu Terry for this project. But also just the long working relationship we've had in the past. And I want to thank each and every one of the contributors. I met many of them, when I was crisscrossing the island to get permission signatures. So, again, it's been a project that isn't just about me, but it's been such a collective team effort and I want to say, thank you to everyone and acknowledge all the people who've been a part of it.

But back to your question, why AfroCubanas and why now? First of all AfroCubanas was a special book in Spanish, it was a special book in Cuba, and now it's a really special book in English. It was a special book in Cuba because it was the first book of its kind. It's the first time that you had a collective group of black women come together to write and publish a book with a state-sponsored press. The state actually comes out with Ciencias Editoriales. So they publish it at the state press. So that's one, a book about black women by black women and two, it has the word AfroCubanas in the title. These are words that are much more accepted now, today, in 2020 in Cuba. But even when the book first came out in 2011 it was a radical idea to think about putting the word AfroCuban in the title because of the fact that many Cubans only like to think of themselves with only their national identity, don't recognize a racial identity and the revolutionary government hasn't recognized that identity. So to call yourself AfroCuban, to call yourself AfroCubana, to identify yourself with your racial identity but to talk about the intersection of race and gender, was actually really radical then and continues to be, in some ways, radical now. When I first got my copy of the book, and I have my copy of the original too, right? So I have a copy with the inscription from Daisy Rubiera Castillo. She gave me the copy of this book in January of 2012. The book had been released in 2011, she saves me a copy, and inside she actually inscribes it, "To my young sister in the fight continue pursuing your dreams and continue fighting against racial discrimination." She gives me the book, I take it back to my casa particular immediately in Havana and I start reading it. The main thing that happened to me was I realized this was really special and this was something that I wanted my students, my family members, my parents, and my colleagues to be able to read in English. The only way to do

that was to do the translation. I'm really close to Daisy Rubiera so I'd been talking with her for a while about what it would look like if we were to do it in English and we just needed the funding and support that I started off thanking people for because that's what really made this possible.

Could you say a little bit more about how you first encountered the book Afrocubanas? How have you used it in your research and in your teaching? How has it informed your thinking?

I first met Daisy Rubiera in 2006. I was a graduate student and I was living in Havana to do my doctoral research that would become my first book. I was there about eight months and I met her in 2006 mainly because I was a fan. If you don't know, another really great book by Daisy Rubiera is "Reyita: the Life of a Black Woman in the Twentieth Century." This book was obviously published in Spanish and then Duke Press published it in English. It's a testimonial, a memoir, about her mother and her mother's life from the early 20th century all the way through the revolution. I had read this as a graduate student in class with Louis Pérez at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill and completely fell in love with the story. But not so much that, it was also that I saw similarities between her mother's story, and my grandmother's and my great grandmother's stories. Similarities about what it was like to be a black woman and try to live throughout the 20th century and to struggle to make what was the best situation for your family. I had been a fan of "Reyita," so I always wanted to meet Daisy Rubiera. I sort of stalked her and found her in Havana through some other connections that I know at the University of Havana. When we first meet, she is amazing. She's a warm and welcoming spirit who wants to make a difference in black people's lives, especially young black women's lives. We started chatting about things that we had in common, we talked about those things and, before I knew it, we had developed a relationship where we met probably once a week while I was there.

So then my students come. The reason I was there for so long was I was leading a study abroad program with a group of students who were in their undergraduates who would be there for six months, and so I had Daisy come and talk to my students. She's talking to my students and she's telling them about this group that she's thinking about starting a collective of black women who get together, and before I know it she's invited me to start coming to the group's meetings. So, whenever I was in Havana, I would attend Afrocubanas working groups meetings and it was just amazing. In some ways that was really powerful for me because it did a couple of things. You asked what happened to my teaching and my research, I'll say more about the group later, but one of the things that I think about what happened then is that Daisy and I started collaborating. We went on to present at a conference together, we have written things together, and so by the time the book came out she definitely wanted to give me a copy. Once I had that copy, even though I had the Spanish copy, I did incorporate it into both my teaching and my research. Since I've been at Davidson I've taught two classes both called Afrocubana Feminisms. This book was a key cornerstone of that class. In that situation literally me and a student sat down and translated the introduction and the prologue ourselves so that the rest of the class could read it. It's actually that introduction and prologue that I shared with you when I was trying to make my pitch for why we should publish the book in English. It's really helped my teaching and my class

in that way, but my students always wanted more. For my own research, I work on anti-racist movements in the 1960s and 70s in Cuba, and really by focusing on black intellectuals and their experiences what that ended up meaning is that the people I've met through my relationship with Daisy Rubiera became collaborators and narrators for my own research. So I've done oral histories with Inés María Martiatu Terry, I've done oral histories with Georgina Herrera, I've done oral histories with Digna Castañeda Fuertes, and a number of them are contributors to the book. It was actually through working with Daisy and through working with AfroCubana working group that I was able to really able to make sure those women's voices were in both my first book "Antiracism in Cuba: The Unfinished Revolution," and my forthcoming book about black consciousness in Cuba in the 1960s and 70s.

Could you say a little bit more about what you and others mean when they say that AfroCubanas is a book that really grew out of, or is the expression of, a social movement?

I think in some ways we have to set the scene. One of the things I talk about a lot in my first book is about black activism in Cuba. Really, black activism in Cuba, in some ways, had to go underground after the early 1960s because the revolutionary leadership said that they eliminated racial discrimination. And they had made a lot of really important strides. They'd integrated education spaces, they'd integrated leisure spaces like beaches and private clubs, they'd increased Afro Cuban employment rates. So by the time you get to the 80s, you really see that black Cubans have the same life expectancy, they had the same standard of education, they have the same standard of living, in many ways, as their white counterparts. What happens then is in the 1990s, when the Soviet Union crashes and falls, that has an incredible impact on Cuba's economy mainly because of the fact that without the Soviet Union able to sort of subsidize the economy, Cuba's economy crashes and they go into what's called the Special Period. In the Special Period there is not enough food, not enough oil, not enough of any basic necessities. People are standing in hours long lines to get anything like bread, coffee, beans, rice. So Cuba has to make certain structural changes so that the country can survive and one of those is by opening the island to tourism and joint business ventures. As soon as that happened, one of the things that you saw happening was that very clearly racial discrimination became a part of the society again and lot of people talked about this is sort of the reemergence, or the return, of racism. In my book I sort of combat that idea. I talk about how racism doesn't go away. You don't lose it. It is not hiding under the table just to reemerge later. Really what happens is that anti-black attitudes persist from the revolutionary period to the present. When there was an economic crisis, I think Mark Sawyer talks about this really well, then you see those attitudes starting to have a play in the economy. There were a number of anti-racist organizations that begin fighting against this persistent discrimination. What type of discrimination am I talking about? I'm talking about how black Cubans couldn't get jobs in the hotels. I'm talking about how black Cubans, especially women, were assumed to be prostitutes when they were walking down the street with a foreigner. So I'd have been assumed to be a prostitute if I was walking down the street with the director of Study Abroad at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill just because I'm a black body and he was a white man. There was a way that you start seeing obvious

types of racial discrimination in the 1990s and so you see all these movements come about to fight against that. And there a number of well known anti-racist organizations in Cuba.

Afrocubanas comes about in the early 2000s in response to the fact that even when there were anti-racist organizations, they didn't always focus on black women. They didn't always focus on the challenges that black women in particular were facing in this new moment. And those are very much gendered as well as racialized challenges, they were intersectional. It was started by Daisy Rubiera, Inés María Martiatu Terry, as well as Alessandra Alvarez who's a blogger, poet Carmen González and painter Paulina Marquez. This group of black women said that they wanted to create a space where black women in Cuba could come together to talk about the challenges they were facing in their everyday life, but also the negative stereotypes that we're now starting to persist. And really, they'd always been there, but now were really embedding themselves again into Cuban society. So what they did you've got a group of women who are all different ages, it's generational. They have all different types of professions. You've got people who are in communications, people who are in the medical field, people who are scholars and intellectuals writers, but also people who were teachers at the regular elementary school. It was sort of a collective group of women but what they did say is, and I did want to quote this for you, is that they said that they had two main goals. One was "to recognize the contribution and the work of black Cuban women," and two, "to stimulate the existence of a counter discourse to dismantle the negative racist and sexist stereotypes about black women in Cuba." One is that they want to talk about just the very existence. They want to recognize black women's contributions in history and art and music and then two, they want to say we're going to push back against those negative stereotypes. That's what led them to do a number of things and the book is one of them, but they are also holding weekly workshops. They're also holding these monthly meetings for the community to come and learn about different topics. Then they decided to publish the book. One of the things that I think is really interesting to say, what does it mean to have a book that comes out of activists' movement? In black studies that's actually not that strange of a thing. In Africana studies and black studies there's been a long history of pairing intellectual scholarship with social activism, but outside of black studies I do think that people aren't as familiar with that. That means that when readers come to this book they should know that this book isn't just something that is for your intellectual consumption, it is also part of a social movement. It's also part of a desire to change the experiences for the better of black women in Cuba and even black women globally.

Afrocubanas is a book that speaks in, and with, many voices. What would you say are its central arguments? Are there main concepts that it, as a book, articulates?

Africana studies is interdisciplinary, transnational and intersectional. We recognize that if we want to study the experiences of black people for the liberation of black people, because that's my definition of African studies, then we know that we have to do that from a variety of perspectives. We have to do that through sociology, we have to through literature, we have to do that through history, we have to do that through politics, we have to do that through art. What you see happening in AfroCubanas, what ties it together, is that it is written for the benefit of

black women and to combat those negative stereotypes that I told you about that exist in Cuban society, but also throughout the world about black women. What unifies them is that goal and what they do is they come at it from a variety of perspectives. The book is quite unified through the three parts that it's described in. You have the history section, you have the thoughts section, and then you have a cultural practices section. They're very intentional about saying the history section is going to open you up to essays that talk about black women's contributions to the nation in the 19th century during the colonial period, during the period of slavery, as well as in the early part of the Republic. The cultural practices section is going to talk to you about black women in Regla de Ocha and Santeria, things that we don't often think about. It's going to talk to you about black women in sports. It's going to talk to you about black women in theater and arts. Then in the political, the sort of thought section, I think that's where you hear people theorizing about what does it mean to be a black woman? What is black femininity in Cuba? What is the intersectional nature of these experiences that they're having? I think what ties it together is this idea that it wants to be a conversation about black feminism and about the intersectional lives that black women live in Cuba all, again, towards that goal of delivering the overarching goal for liberation of black people, but in this particular case, the goal of changing the experiences of women. So that's what unifies it. They come at that from such a variety of perspectives that you actually leave the book with this really rich feeling of wow, I really now have a nice panorama of what black feminism, but also black women's experiences look like in Cuba.

How widely is the book read and engaged in Cuba? How is it read and engaged outside of or beyond the island? Is it mainly read by academics, is it mainly used by activists, or maybe by scholars who are not based in the university at all?

Cuba comes out of the Special Period but the economy hasn't fully recovered. Now that we're in another global recession, we can imagine how that continues to be challenging for the island. Because of that, most books in Cuba are not printed in the same way that books are printed in the United States. There's not going to be multiple runs of a book no matter how popular it is. When the book was released by the press in 2011, they printed 5,000 copies. Those 5,000 copies were immediately snatched up because people were really excited about the book. That's why Daisy had to save me a copy by the time I got there in January, because there was no way that there were going to still be enough copies if I just wanted to go into a bookstore to find it. On one hand, I think that means that the book has been incredibly successful in Cuba because that means that people wanted to buy those initial copies. The book launch was a success, people are reading it, but that also means that after the initial run there, haven't been that many more runs. So it's not widely read in that way but remember, we connected it to a social movement. So if it's connected to a social movement, you don't actually have to have the text for it to have a huge impact on the island because the women who contributed to Afrocubanas continue to do their work all across the island. This is not just a Havana based book, even though that's where the group started, they include contributors from across the island in Santiago, in Cienfuegos, Santa Clara in Trinidad so we have essays about and from people in all of those places. But you also have a sense that those women are continuing to do their work everywhere and still doing the

same platform. But specifically, the Afrocubanas working group was holding those monthly meetings where they had teach-ins, where they invited community members to talk about these ideas. They're giving presentations at cultural institutions like UNEAC, the Union of Writers and Artists, the Casa de África or the Casa Del Caribe. All of these are cultural institutions not just in Havana, but in other places where people give presentations about this work. So I do think that it has a far reach in Cuba even if people haven't been able to get their hands on the exact text. Outside of Cuba, it's also been really important because the Afrocubanas that came together in Havana, also people in other places in Cuba, have already made transnational connections. They're both citing and in conversation with black feminists and transnational black feminist organizations in Brazil, in Colombia, in Ecuador. Daisy has traveled to places to give presentations about the book to collaborate with other black feminists throughout Latin America. That has been an important way that the book has spread not just in Cuba, but throughout Latin America. I talk a little bit in my introduction about that collaboration, because you see that some of the contributors then have essays in similar books in Colombia, in Brazil and vice versa. It's been really important to recognize that this is about transnational black feminism and not just Cuban black feminism. In the U.S., sometimes you have scholars like me who are able to go to Cuba and get a copy and they're able to interact with the book as well. Hopefully more people can interact now that we have an English version.

Is this a book for which there is an obvious or needed sequel or a next second installment?

That's a great question and there already is a sequel. That's what's so exciting. I haven't gotten a copy of it, so I don't have my hands on it yet, but it came out in 2016 right after Inés María Martíatu's death and it's called "Emergiendo del silencio: Mujeres negras en la historia de Cuba (Emerging from the Silence: Black Women in the History of Cuba)." This was the sequel that Daisy Rubiera and Inés María Martíatu Terry decided to come together to do, and this one is specifically about history. It goes even further into that historical perspective, mainly because the editors have been focused on history before. One of the things that I found with the flyer for the book is that it said, "this book specifically aims to fill the gaps in the historiography." I do think it's really important to remember that this social movement also recognizes that the grand Cuban narrative doesn't talk about them. There's so many books that they could write in order to insert black women into that sort of grand narrative of Cuban history.

I think it's interesting because it's also about younger generations taking over. Daisy Rubiera just turned 80 this year. Inés María Martíatu Terry passed away. It's going to be really important for some of the younger contributors to the initial book to take up the mantle and you see that happening to continue to do this work.

What do you hope will come of the book's availability to English language readers?

Right now, especially in the United States with the social protests and the social sort of emerging conversations about race that are happening in our own country, this is an important time to

talk about black feminism. This is a really important time to talk about black women in the United States, but I want everyone to remember that black people have always lived transnational lives. Black Americans have been in conversations with the black Latin Americans, with black Europeans, with Caribbeans for so long because of the fact that white supremacy and anti-blackness is global and the only way to fight it is through a global movement. Even as we focus in on black feminism or black women's experiences in the United States, it's really important to think about transnational black feminism. To think about what do black Cuban women experience? How are their situations similar to, different from? What moments do we see convergences where we can talk and mobilize together because we're all stronger together? This book could have a long reach for people who are interested in black feminism globally. The same way that Audre Lorde's work continues to be held up as something that's really important for the movement. Or Cherríe Moraga's "This Bridge Called My Back" continues to be held up as something that's really important for Latinx populations, but even anyone who's interested in the type of people of color feminism. I think this book can have that same role. I also think that it'll be really interesting to anyone who wants to know more about Latin American social movements, who wants to know more about Cuba, who wants to know more about everyday people's experiences and how they imagine those experiences and talk about them themselves. That's why I think it could be taught in a wider way of Latin American history, anthropology, sociology literature classes, as well as just for everyday readers. Anyone who's interested in thinking about how black lives matter globally.

How do you understand the role of translation projects in building intellectual collaborations between U.S. and Cuban scholars?

I've worked with undergraduate students as well as graduate students and I'm always telling my students how important it is for them to learn languages. Especially if you're going to study Cuba. You don't want to be the Cubanist who doesn't speak Spanish and can't do research in Cuba in the archives, who can't interact with Cuban historiography, who can't interact with Cuban scholars and intellectuals. It's really important for us to learn languages, but not everybody outside of my graduate school program or outside of the ivory tower is going to be able to have the opportunity to learn multiple languages. Which means that, so often, the only information that they have about Cuba comes from U.S. sources and English based sources. First of all, what is translated? I always ask that question. It's often men and they're often white. White, male, Latin Americans will be translated. So you're missing out on a whole different experience from so many other people and a whole different set of knowledge from another group of people. It's really important to do books like this because books like this allow us to have people in the United States, who don't speak Spanish, be able to interact and engage with Cubans because they're getting a sense of that perspective. They're not only reading the things that either Americans write based on U.S. sources or things that have been translated by people who have a lot more money and tend to be a white, male, Latin American translations. It's really important for us to say, well, if we're going to use translation as a way for collaboration, that we have to make sure that our translations projects are equitable. That we're just and fair, that we're translating everyone's experiences. When I talk about the 1960s, I always say over a third of the

population is black and mulatto in Cuba. There have been more contemporary political scientists who say that it's upwards of sixty percent. If we're talking about sixty percent of the population is black or mulatto in Cuba, why in the world are we continuing to translate only white male Cuban leaders of the revolution? I think it's really important for us to move away from that in this book is a really great first step in that direction.

If you could create a wishlist of works by Cuban intellectuals to be translated into English, of authors, of books, of articles, who and what would be on it and why?

Obviously, I'm going to say black Cubans. From there, I actually think that one of the first places I would go is to the table of contents of the edited collection that we just did. There's some people in there who are new and young scholars who haven't published before, but there are also people in there who are well known established scholars, black women scholars in Cuba. So Fátima Patterson, the plays that she has done in Santiago. She has how many plays that she's written? She has how much theater that she's done that hasn't ever been translated? When we think about Georgina Herrera, who is a poet in her 80s now, has been traveling, has been translating, has been writing poetry since she was a girl in the beginning of the revolution. Her poetry is incredible and we should think about translating some of that. I do think there's a part of me that says I would go first to the things that have been written about Sara Gómez. Sara Gómez passed away in the seventies and was a black filmmaker. So she doesn't have a lot of writings but there are a lot of people who've studied her and written about her, and she's a voice that people are trying to recover now by looking at her new documentaries. There's a great new book out about Sara Gómez that we should think about translating that. I would start there and, of course, I'll include some men in my list. Roberto Zurbarano has incredible writings that should be translated. Tomás Fernández Robaina as another black Cuban intellectual who has really incredible writings that should be translated. There's some things from the 60s. The black consciousness political thought pieces that I work with now in my work by Walterio Carbonell and Juan René Betancourt called *The Black Citizen of the Future*, someone who was theorizing about what would a black citizen look like in 1961. His book is banned and he's sent to labor camps because the revolutionary leadership is not interested in this alternative vision. In 2005, they finally reprinted the book in Spanish so it has come back out and is circulating in Cuba but we don't have an English translation of that book. So I could go on and on and on.

There's just such a rich space for black political thought, black activism, including intersectional black feminism, that's happening in Cuba that we could translate lots of things.