

A Trans-Atlantic Encounter—Special Period Migration and La Nueva España:
Geographies and Cultural Production of the Cuban Velvet Exile in Contemporary Spain

by

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Para mi madre y mi abuela—inseparables las tres.
Desde el Cielo, lo han hecho todo posible. E.P.D. 5/11

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ABSTRACT

A Trans-Atlantic Encounter—Special Period Migration and La Nueva España:
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Chair: Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes

My dissertation, interdisciplinary in scope, documents the post-1990 Cuban diaspora and its cultural production in Spain. Specifically, I focus on the Velvet Exile, a migratory wave whose immigration to Spain is spurred by the island's economic demise after the collapse of the Soviet Union. My analysis is framed by the overarching frameworks of globalization and 'coloniality of power'—the recreation of colonial forms of domination in a post-colonial world. In the first chapter, I engage in historical analysis to frame the trans-Atlantic relations between Spain and Cuba through migratory movements since the Conquest. In the second chapter, I turn to ethnographic methods and geography (a discussion of space) to map the Cuban presence in Madrid. Engaging with Michel de Certeau's "Walking in the City" (from *The Practices of Everyday Life*), I analyze

locations established in the Spanish capital during the 1990s that serve as Cuban spaces, contrasting the commercialized places (*La Negra Tomasa*) with private and public ones serving the community as gathering spaces (*La Fundación Hispano-Cubana*) and cultural centers (*Bar Yemayá*). The third chapter examines the Madrid-based musical production of the Cuban hip hop group Orishas and the rock fusion group Habana Abierta. Following Pierre Bourdieu's theorizations about the industry of cultural production, I discuss the needs of a global market and how those translate in selling Cuban music. Chapters 4 and 5 are dedicated to filmic co-productions, addressing the themes of artistic compromise in the workings of the culture industry as seen in Benito Zambrano's narrative film *Habana Blues* (2005) and Arturo Sotto Díaz and Jorge Perugorria's documentary *Habana Abierta* (2002). The fifth chapter's singular case study of Alexis Valdés's film *Un rey en la Habana* (2005) examines topics of imperial nostalgia—the desire to establish continuity with the colonial past—and the use of camp to subvert its discourses. Chapter 6 turns to Cuban literary productions published in Barcelona. Framed by Homi Bhabha's work on stereotypes, the focus is on Cuban women's experience as diasporic subjects in contemporary Madrid as seen in the novels *Maldita danza* (2002) by Alexis Díaz-Pimienta and *Jineteras* (2003) by Lissette Bustamante.

Introduction

Picasso's *Guérnica* displayed at the Reina Sofía Museum and Wilfredo Lam's painting *La jungla* exhibited at Madrid's El Palacio de Cristal. Almodóvar's *Volver* (2006) playing from San Sebastián to Cádiz at theatres nationwide and Alexis Valdés's *Un rey en La Habana* (2005), from Cáceres to Barcelona, just the same. The stomping and olé's of Camarón's legendary flamenco reverberating at Gijón's Jovellanos Theatre while the *tembleque* and *¿cómo's?* of Los Van Van's institutional timba move the masses in Tenerife and Mallorca. Side by side on one of La Casa del Libro's and FNAC's *estrenos* shelves stand Zoe Valdés's and Lucía Etxebarria's latest novels. The sights, sounds and literary expressions of Cuban culture are palpable throughout contemporary Spain right alongside Spanish classics and contemporary works and signal anything but a cacophonous presence there. Here, *lo cubano* goes beyond prized cigars and Havana Club rum to an embrace of, curiosity for, and consumption of the cultural production of Cuban artists who create a painting, produce a film, compose a song or narrate a work of fiction.



Figure 1 Poster Promoting Cuban Artists in Spain 2007

Since 2002, when I moved to Madrid to pursue a Master's degree, I have spent nearly a decade engaging in the city's cultural life, and it has never lacked ample opportunities for experiencing contemporary Cuban culture at its best. From recently released Cuban films to performances given by Cuba's top musicians, from theatrical productions to comedy shows written and performed by Cuban artists to the nightly *descarga* of Cuban classics by a local band at La Negra Tomasa, *lo cubano* has claimed its space in Spain's capital city. The summer of 2007 is especially vivid in my mind because across the Spanish map, Cuban artists made their presence known in various cultural venues. Pianist Chucho Valdés packed Salamanca's Plaza Mayor, La Charanga Habanera performed in Vigo's Playa Samil, in neighboring Gijón, Bebo Valdés promoted his *Lágrimas Negras II*, rock-funk group Habana Abierta played at Madrid's El Clavel, rap group Orishas sang at Tenerife's annual Festival de Músicas Mestizas, and Cuban comedian Jorgito starred in the play *De La Habana a Madrid: En la Máquina del Tiempo* that ran for four months in Madrid's Teatro Alcalá. Turning on the TV proved to be a similar experience. During the month of July alone, there were two History Channel

documentaries on contemporary Cuban politics featuring Fidel Castro, an interview with the Catalan producers of the 2003 documentary *Balseiros*, and a report on the national news channel about the return of 1950s Cuban rhythms to Madrid's *La Reina de Cuba*. Cuban actors continue to be the only non-Spaniards, with the exception of an occasional Brazilian or Argentine, who form part of the cast of sitcoms like Telecinco's *Aquí no hay quien viva* and its spin-off *La que se avecina*. Perhaps even more evident, and the topic of interest in a series of talk shows that summer, was Nilo Márquez's victory on the Spanish version of *Survivor*. While questions about whether the Spanish public had given him their vote out of sympathy because he was a recently arrived Cuban immigrant, it begs the question—is there any doubt that on an island, devoid of nourishment and survival supplies, a Cuban would be triumphant? The debates nonetheless provide a glimpse into the particularities that characterize Hispano-Cuban relations, which can be described, in part, as a love story with the island, its people and its culture born of a long history of transnational relations—from colonial times to the present—between the Caribbean island and its European Motherland. It is a history best summarized by the age-old adage that references the loss of this territory in 1898: *Más se perdió en Cuba*.

Beyond the scope of the culture industry which succeeds at marketing Cuba as a readily consumable, tropical, rhythmical paradise that at times is empty of cultural understanding and valorization, the recent history of neo-colonial relations between both countries must be taken into account in order to delve into the social conditions on both sides of the Atlantic which have strengthened the ties between former colony and colonizer. Specifically, the visibility of *lo cubano* over the past decade must be read in light of increased Cuban immigration to Spain since the 1990s when the Special Period

marked the demise of an island economy heavily dependent on the former Soviet Union. While for Cuba, this period resulted in an open door policy toward foreign investors, for Spain, the 1990s marked the country's presence on the international scene as a potent political and economic force given its inclusion in the European Union (as of 1986) and the subsequent Olympic boom in 1992. Cuban need for economic revival and the post-Franco Spanish desire to re-enter the global market reinforced their political, economic and social ties and facilitated the latest spur of Cuban immigration to Spain: the Velvet Exile. Part of a continuum of trans-Atlantic crossings between both countries, this latest migratory wave is so named for the privileged position that these Cubans have in comparison to earlier groups—most notably the Golden Exile of the 1960s—who, upon leaving the island, were erased from Cuban national history and lost their right to citizenship, property and the right to freely travel to and from the island. Velvet exiles benefit from the Cuban government allowing them to reside abroad and acquire dual citizenship while maintaining land/home rights on the island. Restrictions on travel into and out of the island are nonexistent as the government requires that these Velvet exiles—in order to retain their status as such—keep their travel visas active, at a fee of 300 Convertible Dollars per year. A group whose emigration was propelled by the trying economic situation on the island more than disagreement with its political system, Cubans of this Velvet Exile distinguish themselves from the majority of their exiled predecessors, thus joining the ranks of other Latin American immigrants—mainly Ecuadorians, Colombians and Peruvians—as well as African *pateros* (rafters), who have turned to Spain in the 1990s for the opportunity to escape the poverty of their homelands.

As Spain shifts from a land of emigrants to a welcoming land of immigrants, conserving the national—from food to fashion—is of prime importance. Spain, it should be stated, is a country that still exhibits vestiges of a Francoist outlook, including a culture that is seemingly impermeable to anything foreign. As has been noted by scholars of Spanish cultural studies like Luis Martín Cabrera, Cristina Moreiras-Menor and Joseba Gabilondo, modernization brings unfamiliar challenges like racism, violence, intolerance, and new forms of social marginalization.¹ It is nonetheless my contention, as a Cuban American who has lived in and traveled extensively within Spain and befriended Cubans who reside across the Peninsula and the Canary Islands, that Cubans and Cuban culture are anything but foreign for Spaniards. Perhaps the most evident example, which I came across within my first days of living in Spain, is to be found in a very popular dish that seems to be on *menús del día* from Santander to Seville. For a culture where food and its region of origin are of utmost importance because it conveys the specialty or culinary claim to fame of a Spanish city or town—*pulpo a la gallega*, *bacalao a la bilbaína*, *callos madrileños*, *gazpacho andaluz*, *paella valenciana*, *vino riojano*, *queso manchego*, *crema catalana*—finding *arroz a la cubana* signaled not only a familiarity of the Spanish palate with *lo cubano* that extends to other forms of consumption—as I will argue—but its acceptance as one that is akin to the Spanish. It was precisely while sharing the midday meal with Spanish colleagues over that summer of 2007 that this interplay of Spanish regionalism and a Cuban presence was evident. Amidst praises about the

¹ Luis Martín Cabrera. “Postnational memories and racial violence in *Flores de otro mundo*.” *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, 3:1, 43-55. Cristina Moreiras-Menor. “Critical Interventions on Violence: An Introduction,” *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, 3: 1, 5-8. Joseba Gabilondo. “Historical Memory, Neoliberal Spain, and the Latin American Postcolonial Ghost: On Politics of Recognition, Apology, and Reparation in Contemporary Spanish Historiography.” *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies*, Volume 7, 2003.

location of the restaurant in the sierra of Castilla-León—the heart of the colonial Spanish throne and the region most representative of traditional Spanish language and culture, upheld by the neighboring Universidad de Salamanca—it was evident that our meal was undoubtedly Spanish and the ambiance, set by the Bebo Valdés CD playing throughout the afternoon, was definitely Cuban. Without cacophony, they harmoniously complimented one another.

What follows in these pages is a project born of the sites and sounds to which I, as a *cubana-asturiana nuyorquina (vía Michigan) en Madrid*, have been exposed to over the past ten years. I was struck by the stark differences in what it meant to be Cuban in New York or Miami versus Madrid and what images and products of *lo cubano* defined the Cuban diaspora in Spain. I quickly learned that in Madrid, in light of the Special Period migratory patterns, being Cuban meant being mulata or Afro-Cuban and stared at many skeptical faces when I said that in fact I was of Cuban heritage. This never happened in Miami where I was assumed to be Cuban or in New York where Puerto Rican or Irish were the common assumptions. Cuban culture was also not what it was promoted to be in the States, laden with nostalgia for pre-Castro Cuba. Between political disaffection and lack of socio-economic and political clout for the Cubans of the Velvet Exile, what there is of *lo cubano* is tied to today's Cuba. I saw *La Habana de la Revolución*, its people, its music, its spaces, its mode of speech and behavior in Madrid years before I saw it in Cuba in 2007 and 2008. I saw, as the title of Angel Estéban's recent book on Cuba and Spain indicates, how *Madrid habaneca*. I was perplexed by the lack of engagement of U.S.-based Cuban Studies (unlike the U.K.) with this third space of Cuban culture and further perplexed by the lack of exchange between Miami and Madrid. While Miami is,

for historical reasons, on the radar for Madrid's Cuban community, it was a non-reciprocal situation which peaked my curiosity. There was a need to build bridges, as Ruth Behar would say, not just to Cuba but from the U.S. through Cuba to Spain in light of the aftermath of the Special Period. I should add that I built my own familial bridge while conducting research in Madrid, finding a paternal cousin involved with the literary production of Cuban exiles in that city. I am keenly aware of the pitfalls of attempting to bridge these gaps from my subject position—a Cuban American who can navigate rather easily through the many spaces that make up the Cuban diaspora. My attempt is at broadening the field of Cuban cultural studies to include such a vibrant variant to that which is the norm in the United States. It was in the act of walking through Madrid's streets and neighborhoods, eating *ropa vieja* while listening to a live Cuban band play *La Negra Tomasa* on nostalgic Sunday nights and engaging with young Cuban artists at *El Bar Yemayá* that the need for dialogue between Cubans here and there surfaced. To that diaspora (and Spanish investment) which promotes Cuban culture in Spain is that I owe my academic New York/Miami-Habana-Madrid boomerang venture.

In this dissertation I document the post-1990 presence of the Cuban diaspora in Spain and its cultural production in Madrid, mentioning the importance of the Barcelona publishing industry for Cuban literary production that speaks to the female Cuban experience in Spain's capital city. Madrid is the protagonist of this work not because of its singularity as a place/space for Cuban cultural production in the Iberian Peninsula but due to its existence as former metropole. I contend that the economic conditions of the 1990s—favorable for La Nueva España and unfavorable for Special Period Cuba—establishes a co-dependency model between both countries that allows Spain to amend its

history of colonial loss by aggressively investing in the Cuban culture industry. As a result, Spain exerts imperial power over the culture industry that replicates imperial models of the colonial era. This is best understood through the lens of ‘coloniality’ which Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano defines as the continuity of colonial forms of domination after the end of colonial administrations produced by colonial cultures and structures in the modern/colonial/capitalist world-system.² The industry of cultural production is where I see the workings of ‘coloniality,’ that is power structures as they play out in the Hispano-Cuban production of space, music, film and literature and therefore Bourdieu’s theorizations about the industry of cultural production also guide my analysis. I believe ‘coloniality’ at times intersects with imperial nostalgia—a desire to establish continuity with the past that reverts to an imperial colonizer/colonized dichotomy—in a 1990s context as some case studies will demonstrate. Thus, the centrality of the family trope for understanding Hispano-Cuban relations and the notion of a ‘homecoming’ in describing the subsequent Cuban migration to Spain is present in most chapters. Aware of the danger of over-romanticizing the relationship between both countries, I highlight that I understand this Cuban migratory wave of the 1990s within a greater phenomenon of colonial migration. Colonial migration, as understood by Ramón Grosfoguel in his study of Puerto Rican migration to the United States, speaks to the movement of formerly colonized people to the metropolises of former empires. It is charged with the implications of an old world order (colonialism) in a new world scheme (post-colonialism, neo-colonialism or modern colonialism). It is within this context that diaspora is used throughout these chapters—the case of Cubans arriving in Spain,

² As quoted in Ramon Grosfoguel’s *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans In A Global Perspective* (University of California Press: 2003), 4.

particularly Madrid, speaks to colonial migration synonymous of Caribbean diasporic migration.

It is important for the discussions that follow to clearly delineate the Spanish psyche during the last decade of the twentieth century and how it manifested itself in the political, economic and social realms to be discussed at length throughout the dissertation. It is not my intent to impose a conquerer's guise on all Spaniards or to imply that Spain is simply out to re-conquer all its former colonies in light of its newfound economic stability of the 1990s. In revealing general attitudes and perceptions of attitudes or better said, stereotypes, my intent is not to create others. It is also not my objective to vilify Spain and Spaniards, to say that they can only relate to Cubans through essentialist colonial binaries that render Cubans inferior. Likewise, I do not aim to sugar coat the history between both nations as a simplistic love affair, albeit a familial one, between empire and conquered territory. It is also not my objective to reduce the Cuban diaspora in Madrid to that of a devalued second class citizenry. There are ample numbers of exiles who are not part of the 1990s migratory wave and whose experience of assimilation into Spanish society is drastically different from those of the Velvet Exile. What I highlight is that in the face of increasing globalization and Cuba's economic demise which renders internal markets for cultural production and consumption obsolete, it is the culture industry which allows, in a critical moment of both Spain and Cuba's history, for Spain to aggressively invest in Cuba through a clear model of 'coloniality.' As a result, the influx of the Velvet Exile to Spain is facilitated during the 1990s. It is important to note that since the 1990s, Cubans have been the most kaleidoscopic of immigrant contributors to Spain's cultural production scene, joining the ranks of such lauded and embraced

predecessors as the Dominican merengue artist Juan Luis Guerra who a decade earlier had set the stage for the further Caribbean presence Spain would witness in the last decade of the twentieth century. Cuban immigrants and their culture have enriched the Spanish cultural landscape in ways unparalleled by other groups, Latin American (Argentines, Colombians, Ecuadorians) and non-Latin Americans (Eastern Europeans, Africans) alike and thus the importance of delving into their contributions in this dissertation.

“Spain’s Year” was 1992 and it coincided with Fifth Centenary celebrations termed *el encuentro*. It is worth noting that Spanish writer and intellectual Juan Goytisolo was adamantly opposed to the commemoration of the Conquest and was amongst a score of other Latin American intellectuals—including Octavio Paz, Ernesto Sábato, and Mario Benedetti—who signed the Morelia Declaration of the Grupo de los Cien denouncing the negative consequences of the so-called “Discovery of America.”³ Nonetheless, 1992’s celebrations meant, in the words of Dorothy Kelly, “a ceremonious and congratulatory attitude officially constructed by Socialist politicians and the King as a return for Spain to her rightful place in the world arena, in a delicate balancing act between delusions of neo-colonial grandeur and the minor role in world politics.”⁴ It was in 1992, as Michael Richards points out that, “Christopher Columbus was reappropriated for Spain, as he had been by the highly conservative creators of *hispanidad* in the lead up to the Civil War of

³ Tony Morgan, “1992: Memories and Modernities.” (in *Contemporary Spanish Cultural Studies* ed. Barry Jordan and Rikki Morgan-Tamosunas. London: Arnold, 2000), 61.

⁴ Dorothy Kelly, “Selling Spanish ‘Otherness’ Since the 1960s.” (in *Contemporary Spanish Cultural Studies* ed. Barry Jordan and Rikki Morgan-Tamosunas. London: Arnold, 2000), 34.

the 1930s.”⁵ Although colonial heritage was duly commemorated by the Spanish political establishment, explains Tony Morgan, the Spanish Socialist Workers Party’s (el PSOE) 1992 May Day Manifesto did not mention the colonial past focusing on the platform for the future, the project of modernity, which lay before Spain in being a full functional part of Europe.⁶ It was a repetition of the aftermath of 1898, as Josep Fradera has observed, in reconstructing Spain’s identity as European.⁷ Nonetheless, the Spanish administration and monarchy, Morgan highlights, were displaying a renewed interest in restoring as well as undertaking new cultural links with Latin America, as the ghosts of colonial guilt were laid to rest.⁸ Thus, ‘coloniality,’ the specters of a past history with present possibilities were in the Spanish air. All these elements coincided with the island’s Special Period of the 1990s. Cuba was on Europe’s radar (primarily that of Italy and France) due to lucrative investment opportunities, and thus the interest in an aggressive economic return to the Caribbean island indicated Spain’s European aspect identity. The fate of the two co-dependent countries seemed to be lingering in the Atlantic.

My dissertation is interdisciplinary in scope and has led me to wear many metaphorical hats in terms of theoretical approximations and modes of conducting research. In the first chapter, *Of Post-Colonial Times and Neo-Colonial Ties: ‘Colonialities of Power’ and Regaining What Was Lost in Cuba*, I engage in historical

⁵ Michael Richards, “Collective Memory, The Nation-State and Post-Franco Society,” (in *Contemporary Spanish Cultural Studies* ed. Barry Jordan and Rikki Morgan-Tamosunas. London: Arnold, 2000), 45.

⁶ Morgan 65.

⁷ Josep Fradera, as quoted in *Más se perdió en Cuba: España, 1898 y la crisis de fin de siglo*. Juan Pan-Montojo (ed.) (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2006), 11.

⁸ Morgan 59.

analysis to frame the relations between Spain and Cuba through migratory movements. I insert the so-called Velvet Exile—Cuban immigrants who arrived in Spain during the 1990s following the economic demise on the island that ensued from the dismantling of the Soviet Union—within this centuries old trans-Atlantic history. I address the ways in which the latest wave of Cuban colonial migration to Madrid shows similar traits to that of other Latin American immigrants arriving within the same time period yet exhibit signs of exceptionalism on the basis of imperial nostalgia's family trope. Also discussed is how the events of 1990s—at home and in Cuba—allow Spain to re-inscribe its protagonism in Cuba's future which to some extent vindicates the historical wound of 1898 by which Cuba/empire were lost. The rest of the chapters take up a series of booms in Cuban cultural production seen in spatial, musical, filmic and literary spheres framed by discussions of race and diasporic positioning.

In chapter 2, *Our Places, Their Spaces: Cubanized Madrid*, I engage in ethnographic methods and discussions of space (mainly urban palimpsests) to analyze the “Cuban geography” of Madrid. I refer to private and public spaces where Cubans and Spaniards interact in Madrid, contrasting the commercialized spaces (live entertainment venues, like *La Negra Tomasa*, for example) with Cuban spaces reserved for politics (La Fundación Hispano-Cubana) or as community cultural centers (*El Bar Yemayá*). Through this walk in the city, in a fashion similar to de Certeau, I not only explore Madrid's Cuban places and spaces but I delve into the identity politics found there. I analyze the pertinent differences between what I call *spectacular* Cubans who perform their Cuban identity for profit at entertainment venues, the intellectuals belonging to an older

generation of self-identified *exiles*, and that of the 1990s wave of artists and economic refugees with little or no political motivations for their migration.

In the third chapter entitled *Cubans Seen, Cubans Heard. The Boom of Cuban Musical Spain*, I historicize the musical linkage between Spain and Cuba, focusing on the boom of Cuban musical production in Madrid during the 1990s. I present two case studies—that of hip hop group Orishas and that of rock fusion group Habana Abierta—for an understanding of globalized cultural production of Cuban music in Spain. Parting from theoretical understandings of the trans-Atlantic as a gray zone of instability akin to the diasporic experience, I engage in a lyrical analysis of Orishas’s songs reading them as narratives of displacement. Their music speaks to the Afro-Cuban diasporic condition in Europe for artists who, careers aside, are also migratory subjects exposed to the daily workings of a fairly new multicultural Spanish society where racism and marginalization are experienced. I explore issues of production and categorical marketing of Cuban music (Cuban versus global sound) through a dialogue with Pierre Bourdieu’s theorizations on cultural and symbolic capitals within the industry of musical production. I suggest that the successful career of these *raperos y rockeros* is tied to the idea of the “unexpected” production (not your typical *son* or *salsa*) of contestatory genres in Castro’s Cuba.

I undertake a similar analysis in chapter 4, *Havana Seen, Havana Heard, Cuban Sound in Image: The Case of Habana Blues and Habana Abierta*. Within a broader discussion of the extensive filmic co-productions that salvaged the Cuban film industry from extinction during the 1990s, I turn specifically to the narrative film *Habana Blues* (2005) to discuss the balancing act between market needs and expectations within the

industry of cultural production and artistic compromise.⁹ Through the documentary *Habana Abierta* (2002) I analyze song lyrics in conjunction with telling footage to address the boomerang effect of the rock fusion group whose return to Cuba as famed stars speaks to Cuba's willingness to officially recognize otherwise subversive artistic forms of expression in light of Special Period economics.

The next chapter serves as an extension of the filmic co-production discussion with a close reading of a singular case study of a 2005 narrative film. Entitled *Of What Was Reclaimed in Havana: Vestiges of Imperial Nostalgia in Alexis Valdés's Un rey en la Habana*, chapter 5 compliments the historical background of the Special Period and the New Spain of the 1990s within the framework of imperial nostalgia while opening the conversation to the role that the Cuban diasporic subject—Cuban-born, Miami-based, Madrid emigré comedian Alexis Valdés—plays in a Cuban industry of cultural production open to foreign investment. It is a unique case in which Miami, Havana and Madrid are, filmically speaking, in dialogue with one another through cultural production in contemporary times. I address the ways in which Valdés resorts to the comedy genre and to uses of *camp* à la Pedro Almodóvar to both expose Cuba's neo-colonial relationship with Spain and to subvert discourses of colonialism and its impending dichotomies, 'coloniality' and its accompanying imperial nostalgia.

Finally, chapter 6, *The Cuban Literary Boom in Spain*, highlights the important role that Barcelona publishing houses have had for the distribution of Cuban fiction

⁹ According to my research at Cuba's Film Institute (ICAIC), specifically informal conversations with directors Mario Naito López and Antonio Mazón Robau as well as with Cuban film expert María Eulalia Douglas, film co-productions are those in which Spain (in this case) finances the costs of production while Cuba contributes actors and locations.

during the 1990s while engaging in close readings of novels that speak to the experiences of Cuban women who form part of the Madrid diaspora. Using Alexis Díaz-Pimienta's *Maldita danza* (2002) and Lissette Bustamante's *Jineteras* (2003) in conjunction with Homi Bhabha's theorizations about the "Other," I explore the prevalence of colonially rooted stereotypes about Cuba and its mulatas as narrated and perceived by the female protagonists of the novels which conditions their experience in Spain's capital city. The narrators of both novels are 'exceptional' Cuban women insofar as they are professionals—a Musicologist in *Maldita danza* and a journalist in *Jineteras*—and thus their struggles against *los tópicos* is all the more significant in their feminist contestation of the tropicalization of the 'typical' Cuban woman. *Maldita danza* provoked an analysis of the repetitive nature of stereotypes as a destabilizing metaphor for the greater process of 'coloniality' and the Cuban exception within the migratory history of Spain in the 1990s. It also led me to the seed, Alejo Carpentier, in an attempt to retrace the protagonist's lost steps from Havana to Madrid in two worlds that are eerily parallel. *Jineteras*, set in Madrid but intent on revealing the workings of imperial outlooks toward Cuba's women similar to those in Spain broadens the field of cultural production to include Austria. Engaged with an extensive bibliography on the prostitution phenomenon of Special Period Cuba, scholarly work on memory and its intersection with the writing of self, testimonio and allowing the subaltern to speak, *Jineteras* presents a paradigmatic text of Cuban redemption for the diasporic female subject. Exploiting the journalistic genre (although fictively), through the doubling of the self *Jinetera*'s author and narrator speak to the undoing of centuries old models of colonial subordination that in light of

Cuba's Special Period and Spain's protagonism in world affairs resurface in the body of the *jinetera*—the metaphor of a Cuba that sells itself to Spain as of the 1990s.

**Chapter 1. Of Post-Colonial Times and Neo-Colonial Ties:
'Colonialities of Power' and Regaining What Was Lost in Cuba**

Given the intertwined history of colonizer and colonized—as Edward Said has pointed out—the social, economic and political relations between Spain and Cuba in the past decade reflect a shared history that far from being severed in the post-colonial era were maintained to differing degrees into the 21st century. It is within that historical context that Cuban immigration to Spain during the 1990s must be understood—as a direct consequence of a Motherland that never ceased being a mother to Cuba and its people. It is the post-colonial effects of Spanish parentage, tutelage, and protectionism and Spain's harboring of familial sentiment toward Cuba—in addition to its economic interests—that allows the Spanish Motherland to rescue her Cuban child in time of need. As Spain facilitates an escape from a bleak Cuban reality for members of the Velvet Exile, it provides a homecoming for Cubans, a return to the land from which their Spanish ancestors parted for the island—first as settlers and now as investors. Parting from a present rooted in the continuum of the past and using the mother-daughter relationship as a guiding metaphor, I will historicize Spain's construction of Cuba and its people as *domestic in a foreign sense* as a way of approaching Cuban immigration to Spain during

the 1990s.¹ It is not my intention to romanticize the history shared by both countries nor to impose such a reading on the migratory patterns and experiences of the Cuban diaspora in Spain during the 1990s. Cubans who migrate during the Special Period do not speak Castilian Spanish but rather the Cuban variant, they are economically downtrodden and technically fall into the pejorative *sudaca* category as Argentines, Colombians, Ecuadorians and other Latin American immigrants would.² Nonetheless, their Caribbean variant of Spanish is well received insofar as it is perceived as comical and reflective of a certain tropical craftiness that sets them apart from others. Poverty is expected of Cubans as their migratory status is inextricably linked to Castro and to island economics and thus there is a certain empathy from which other groups don't seem to benefit. I speculate this is indicative of a motherly sentiment from the part of Spaniards, who feel that Cubans have dealt with economic hardship because—reverting to the psyche of colonial loss—it

¹ *Domestic in a foreign sense* is a colonial term employed by the United States in relation to its unincorporated territories that belong to but are not a part of the United States. It has been used more commonly to denote the relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States. The term was born out of the Insular Cases (1901-1922) whereby the Supreme Court established what until today is considered the constitutional backbone of U.S. territorial policy. As Christina Duffy Burnett and Burke Marshall document in their book *Domestic in a Foreign Sense: Puerto Rico, American Expansion, and the Constitution* (North Carolina: Duke University Press Books, 2001), the ruling determined that Puerto Rico was not a foreign country in an international sense because it was a U.S. possession subject to its sovereignty. The island was foreign in a domestic sense because it had not been incorporated in the United States, being appurtenant to it.

² According to the Real Academia de la lengua española, “*sudaca*” is the pejorative term used in Spain to refer to people from South America. According to María Moliner’s dictionary of usage of the Spanish language, *Diccionario de uso del español*, the pejorative term “*sudaca*” is used to reference people from the Spanish-speaking world (other than Spain). In his essay, “*Tú, sudaca*”. *Las dimensiones histórico-geográficas, sociopolíticas y culturales alrededor del significado de ser inmigrante (y argentino) en España*. (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Prometeo Libros, 2007), Alejandro Goldberg hints at a broader use of the term that includes immigrants that are “extracomunitarios,” i.e. those from countries that do not belong to the European Community. Specifically, the Argentine anthropologist pinpoints them as non-European, non-U.S., Third World migrants, 51.

struggled historically in the Motherland's absence giving way to an altering influence in that of the paternalistic U.S. While Cuba is considered to geographically partake in the definition of South America as implied in the term *sudaca*, neither my personal experiences nor my research indicates the term's use in referencing Cubans. Therefore, I hint at the existence of a Cuban exceptionalism in regards to being "taken-in" in relative facile ways when compared to other immigrants. This is not to say that their arrival is not "polluted by colonial history" as proposed by Ramón Grosfoguel whose application of the "colonialities of power" perspective to migratory history is present in my analysis. The term "coloniality of power," which Grosfoguel borrows from Aníbal Quijano, refers, in part, to Third World migrants' inscription in the racial/ethnic hierarchy in metropolitan global cities in light of the modern/colonial/capitalist world-system.³ It is Grosfoguel's contention that:

Migrants from colonial and former colonial areas, are not just another group of immigrants; they are subject to treatment as "colonial/racialized subjects of empire"—that is, subjects inside the empire as part of a long colonial history. The metropolitan colonial imaginary, racial/ethnic hierarchy, and racist discourses are frequently constructed in relation to these subjects. A long history of racialization and inferiorization of "colonial/racial subjects of empire" informs, constitutes, and determines present power relations. The coloniality of power of the metropolitan country is organized around and against these colonial subjects; they are frequently at the bottom of the racial/ethnic category.⁴

Historicizing the special relations between Spain and Cuba does not trump the patterns observed by Grosfoguel but is intended to establish a trajectory of cultural and economic ties fundamental to an understanding that facilitate the migratory patterns from island to

³ Ramón Grosfoguel. *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective*. (Berkeley: University of California Press: 2003), 4.

⁴ Ramón Grosfoguel, Margarita Cervantes-Rodríguez and Eric Mielants. *Caribbean Migration to Western Europe and the United States: Essays on Incorporation, Identity and Citizenship*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), 8-10.

Peninsula during the Special Period. From the Spanish arrival in the 1500s to the Cuban Spanish revival in the 1990s, from the arrival of Cuban political refugees in the 1960s to Cuban economic refugees in the 1990s in Spain, the coetaneous protagonist role of Spain, the United States, and after 1959, the Soviet Union in Cuba's history sets up the island's neo-colonial condition that permits Spanish neo-colonization in the last decade of the of the twentieth century. Here, the post-colonial will be used as a time referent after 1898 where the cultural effects of colonization in Cuban society are analyzed.

Once Spain no longer exerted political control over a newly sovereign Cuba in the twentieth century, Spaniards within Cuba, not expelled like in other former colonies, continued making political decisions (in the case of the Cuban Spanish bourgeoisie and elite), and driving the Cuban economy (in the case of Spanish migrant laborers) until 1959. Because Spaniards never left post-emancipation Cuba, ties between both countries were never completely severed. I thus contend that the most evident post-colonial effect of the Spanish colonial presence in Cuba was that it was culturally conditioned to be a neo-colony. Neo-colony refers to a sovereign Cuban state that through a historically specific situation in post-colonial times has renewed an economic or political tie with a former colonizer, specifically Spain. An accurate exercise in historicizing the Cuba-Spain relation cannot overlook the influence of American and Soviet superpowers along the continuum and thus they factor into the events that have influenced the Spanish return to Cuba that has in turn spurred Cuban immigration to Spain during the Special Period. Neo-colonial conditioning facilitated Spain's return to regain what was lost in Cuba nearly a century earlier. If Cuba was once the colonial glory of imperial Spain, the new elites brought to power by independence—the sons and daughters of colonial rulers—

assured that control of the former colony was still in Spanish hands, making Cuba a Spanish neo-colony from the inception of the Republic until Castro's Revolution. Until 1902 the Platt Amendment enforced by the United States established the paternalistic undertones of the U.S.-Cuba relationship that led to an American propelled neo-colonialist state during the Batista era. Cuba was, culturally, politically and economically its northern neighbor's tropical backyard. Under Castro, in the midst of the Cold War, the politically binding role of the USSR in providing aid and development programs to a Cuba reluctant to partake in a capitalist economy turned it into a Soviet neo-colony. With the Soviet collapse in 1991, the subsequent Special Period in Cuba signaled the inability of a Cuban Third World economy to develop an independent economic identity under the pressure of globalization. As Spain's 19th century imperial demise was replaced by its own dominant neo-colonialist role in establishing a global capitalist economy in the post-Franco, European Union era, Spain re-establishes a colonial order in post-colonial times that Cuba fought to eradicate under José Martí and late Fidel Castro, but in the face of necessity must welcome its return. It is not in vain that during the Special Period at Havana's monument to independence leader Antonio Maceo someone warned: "*Despierta Maceo que otra vez los gallegos nos están colonizando.*"⁵ If Spaniards had already built Cuba—through its leaders, its laborers, through the dissemination of their cultural heritage, and through the parenting of Cuban generations to come—Spaniards were to rebuild it in post-Soviet times. It would be the same *criollos* who led Cubans to the Revolution of 1959, to the severing of ties with the United States, and to the

⁵ Dominga González Suárez. "Los españoles en Cuba, Conflictos y Estereotipos." *Cuba in Transition* ASCE 2005: Volume 15, 218.

establishment of the Russian neo-colonial state who would lead them to Spanish neo-colonialism. As the last bastion of Spanish colonial power in the Americas, Cuba was the first bastion of a new superpower to restore its prestige and glory lost in 1898. For a country long under Fascist rule, Spain psychologically sought to break with an inferiority complex, and Cuba was the prized possession, vivid in the Spanish memory, that needed to be re-conquered. Historic conditions on both sides of the Atlantic during the 1990s—the Special Period in Cuba and Spain’s re-incorporation into the global market—allowed the imperial power turned superpower to economically re-conquer what historically led to its demise transforming Cuba from a former colony to a neo-colony; if more was lost in Cuba, even more was to be regained.

Spanish Ancestors Arrive

Spain is for Cubans today what Cuba was for Spanish immigrants during the 19th and 20th centuries—a land of opportunity. With the abolition of slavery in 1886, Cuba could no longer depend on a centuries-old labor force to maintain the sugar industry at its prime. Despite the technological advances, introduced in 1878, that improved production, manual labor was still the foundational element in the industry’s success. After all, it was the importance of the slave hand, coupled with fears of a slave rebellion similar to that in neighboring Saint Domingue in 1791 that perpetuated both slavery and Spanish rule in Cuba well into the 19th century. Thus the need for manual labor resulted in an active campaign for immigration to the island led by the Cuban elite. As Consuelo Naranjo Orovio explains, the advent of a racially mixed society not only created economic and political concerns for the ruling class but instilled a cultural fear of the Africanization of

Cuba that gave way to a colonization project aimed at preventing the arrival of undesirable immigrants, mainly Asians and blacks from Jamaica, Haiti, and Africa. As Naranjo Orovio writes

Por diferentes intereses de la elite y del gobierno español la procedencia del inmigrante se circunscribió a la península y Canarias, por ser los individuos que se adaptaban, asimilaban e integraban más fácilmente al país, así como por construir una población blanca que contribuiría a hacer realidad los deseos de blanquear la isla y formar una sociedad compuesta por un campesinado blanco y, en estos momentos, español.⁶

The figures she provides estimate that between the 1880s and 1899, over 500,000 Spaniards arrived in Cuba as part of the Europeanization, or more precisely, Hispanization of the island, with those from Galicia and Asturias making up nearly 50 percent of the Spanish population and Spaniards from the Canary Islands making up about 17 percent. The temporary nature of that immigration wave subsequently took on a permanent nature for a third of those Spaniards and increased not only once the War for Independence was underway, but reached its heights in the twentieth century during the First Republic. Although the colonial era came to a close politically as ties to the Spanish throne ceased, Cuba was in fact a Spanish neo-colony both economically and culturally because the Spanish elite continued to be at the forefront of the sugar empire thanks to their stronghold over Cuban commerce—import and export alike—and their protagonism in the banking sector. Unlike what occurred in other former Spanish colonies, Spanish citizens were not expelled following independence⁷ and thus, as a promised land, Cuba continued to attract Spaniards in large numbers until 1921 when sugar prices plummeted

⁶ Consuelo Naranjo-Orovio, “De aquí y de allá: inmigrantes españoles en Cuba.” *De la España que emigra a la España que acoge* (Madrid: Fundación F. Largo Caballero y Obra Social Caja Duero, 2005), 99.

⁷ Marifeli Pérez-Stable. *The Cuban Revolution. Origins, Course, and Legacy*. (New York: Oxford University Press: 1999), 17.

and nationalist measures were taken to halt the influx of foreigners. Between 1915 and 1921 Cuba was the preferred destination for immigration—later to be replaced by Argentina and Brazil—and Spaniards represented nearly 80 percent of the immigrant population on the island.⁸ Havana in fact comprised one of the largest Spanish cities according to the number of Spanish citizens residing in it.⁹ Galicians and Asturians alone composed 70 percent of the Spanish populations in Cuba and, not surprisingly, according to Alejandro García, until 1920 control of Cuban capital was in the hands of “la burguesía hispano-cubana”.¹⁰ Just seven years later, almost half of the island’s industry was under their control.

It was precisely this Hispano-Cuban bourgeoisie who, at the political forefront of the nation, imagined it as one with an ethnic and cultural foundation rooted in the Spanish male—the embodiment of civilization and progress. The prolonged Spanish presence in Cuba assured the island’s cultural construction in the image and likeness of a homogenous Motherland, and it is perhaps why in comparison to the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, both of which earned monikers reflecting their indigenous past—Quisqueya la Bella and Borinquen Querido—Cuba was baptized the Pearl of the Antilles; as valuable, economically and politically as a pearl, imagined pure as a pearl, culturally and racially, as Spain herself; Cuba—precious and prized, a daughter in the tropics. As Spanish immigrants continued to make Cuba a home away from home,

⁸ German Rueda. “La emigración hacia América en la edad contemporánea” *De la España que emigra a la España que acoge* (Madrid: Fundación F. Largo Caballero y Obra Social Caja Duero, 2005), 70.

⁹ Jordi Maluquer de Motes. “La Inmigración Española en Cuba: Elementos de un debate histórico”. *Cuba Perla de las Antillas*. Actas de las Jornadas sobre “Cuba y su historia.” (Aranjuez: Doce Calles, 1994), 140.

¹⁰ Alejandro García. *Inmigrantes de España*. (Zacatecas: Ediciones Cuéllar: 2002), 112.

mutual aid societies that eased the transition from Spain to Cuba were created, and monuments to Spanish culture that served as exclusive meeting places for the Spanish elite and their Cuban relatives were built, El Centro Gallego and El Centro Asturiano among them. As spaces that commemorate the Spanish collectivity in Cuba, they continue to adorn the center of Old Havana with their decadent splendor, as reminders of the indelible presence of that community in the island's history. For Naranjo Orovio, these architectural structures:

...Recuerdan la importancia cualitativa, simbólica y real, que los españoles tuvieron en la República de Cuba, en la que convivieron y formaron familias, muchos de cuyos hijos “pichones” de gallegos, de asturianos o de canarios... siguen siendo socios de algunas de las asociaciones que permanecen activas... en las que se recrean bailes regionales con contenidos de aquí y de allá.¹¹

Indeed with time, Spanish families grew to include generations living across the Atlantic, *creoles* and transplanted *peninsulares* alike, which transformed the family unit into one that was, much like my own, equally Spanish and Cuban. While the latter “pichón” generation was inevitable because of the prolonged Spanish presence on the island, Spanish immigrants were responsible for creating what I call the “Colocado” generation or perhaps more fittingly, within the Cuban vernacular, the “colado” generation.¹² It became customary for Spanish merchants to send for relatives—primarily nephews or other young males—from back home to work most commonly in *bodegas* or *tiendas de ultramarinos* as they are known in Spain, to teach them the family business they were one day to inherit. By promoting the laboring hand of the immigrant Spanish relative, the

¹¹ Naranjo Orovio, 111.

¹² Colocado/a is used here to describe someone who has been granted a labor position due to familial ties. Colado/a, someone who has been literally snuck in, hints at a favoritism unfavorable to the native worker who is unrelated to his/her boss

Cuban born relatives of merchants—sons included—were not involved in the family business except to the degree that they reaped its economic benefits like attending private schools and forming part of elitist Spanish clubs. Thus the traditional *gallego colado* was synonymous with Spaniard regardless of region of origin due to their sheer numbers and helped fuel the sense that it was Spaniards alone who made Cuba a recognizable economic entity. That sentiment is sure to lie behind the coining, in Spain, of the phrase: *Padre bodeguero (gallego), hijo millonario (criollo), y nieto pordiosero (cubano)*.¹³ However, sending for the family across the Atlantic, imbued with the promise of inheritance—addressed in Miguel Barnet’s 1983 novel *Gallego*—gave Spanish immigration its familial character and signaled the permanency of a Spanish posterity in Cuba, their new home, that was nonetheless tied economically and culturally to the homeland. As José Antonio Vidal Rodríguez explains,

Con esta estrategia migratoria y laboral toda la familia se beneficiaba: el tío del trabajo barato y fiel del *sobrino*, éste de un trabajo fijo y con expectativas, y su familia con las remesas que el primero enviaba por el trabajo del último.¹⁴

Remittances, as a defining element of immigrant communities, were a vital part of the ties that Spanish immigrants kept with Spain. Steady sources of income, remittances were not only vital to the survival of families left behind, but also financed nationwide modernization and industrialization projects, the building of schools and the development of private banking sectors. José Antonio Pérez points out that from colonial times until 1930—the Golden Era of remittances to Spain—Cuba was one of the three major sources of the billions of dollars sent by Spaniards living abroad. Even when immigration to

¹³ This translates to Merchant father (from Galicia), millionaire son (criollo), beggar grandson (Cuban).

¹⁴ José Antonio Vidal Rodríguez. *La emigración gallega a Cuba: Trayectos Migratorios, Inserción y movimiento laboral 1868-1968*. (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigación Científicas) 237.

Cuba dwindled in the subsequent twenty year span, until 1959, Cuba continued to be one of four major sources of remittances to Spain.¹⁵ Hence, Cuba, its people, and their fate—political, cultural and economic—were, far from foreign, familiar and akin and inevitably the Motherland would be intrinsically bound to the vicissitudes of the daughter republic's destiny.¹⁶

Politically, that destiny was to be marked by turmoil from the 1930s until Castro's Revolution and its aftermath into the 21st century. After President Gerardo Machado was ousted in 1933, Fulgencio Batista was to be in charge of the "Sergeants' Revolt" that replaced the subsequent provisional government and he would be the driving military force behind the eight interim leaders Cuba was to have in a seven year span. Both Batista—a United States ally who staged two coups during the 1950s and was in power until he was overthrown—and Fidel Castro—a guerrilla fighter opposed to American interests on the island and Batista's successor in 1959—would protagonize, as archenemies, Cuba's struggle for political stability. Within weeks of the Machado downfall, a *Ley de Nacionalización del Trabajo* or *La Ley del Cincuenta Por Ciento* was instated to protect native Cuban workers by obliging all companies and businesses to have a work force that was at least 50 percent Cuban born. According to Vidal Rodríguez,

...Esta medida xenófoba y demagógica expulsara de sus puestos de trabajo a decenas de miles de trabajadores extranjeros, prncialmente haitianos, jamaicanos y españoles, sin considerar su situación familiar ni los años de residencia en la isla, ni que muchos de estos trabajadores, industriales, y comerciantes españoles

¹⁵ José Antonio Pérez. "Las remesas económicas de los inmigrantes españoles". *Madrid entre dos orillas* www.entredosorillas.org/verdocumento.aspx?id=120&titulo=RemesasEconomicas.

¹⁶ Naranjo Orovio 102.

hubiesen contribuido decisivamente al triunfo de la revolución popular que acabó con la dictadura de Machado.¹⁷

In this way the Spanish labor monopoly was debilitated and scores of Spanish workers, including those who had become Cuban citizens, were unemployed, unemployable and with little other choice than repatriation. Richard Gott argues that the nationalist fervor that resulted from the revolution of 1933 allowed Cubans to vent resentment against what was perceived as the arrogance of the Spanish immigrants. Perhaps there is truth to that, given the culture of *el gallego colado* already discussed, however more importantly, as Gott points out, is the psychological blow that this law delivered to the powerful Spanish community. Like a child who rebels against a parent through an unexpected and shameful act, the Cuban government's action against the citizens of the mother country were, in Gott's words, "a grave humiliation".¹⁸ However, the Constitution of 1940 was to appease that humiliation to some degree by equating *creoles* with Cubans by redefining the legal meaning of being considered Cuban. It gave first generation Cuban born Spaniards equal footing with Cuban citizens for the first time because being legally recognized as Cuban had been defined by both Cuban birth and Cuban parentage until then, and under the new constitution, anyone born on the island regardless of ancestry, was considered Cuban.¹⁹ Although the Spanish bourgeoisie was not affected by the nationalist labor measure, they turned to the Spanish aid societies on the island and collaborated with Spanish consulates to finance the return home of nearly 70,000 Spaniards until the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 halted the process until the war's end in 1939.

¹⁷ Vidal Rodríguez 59.

¹⁸ Richard Gott. *Cuba: A New History*. (Connecticut: Yale University Press: 2005) 141.

¹⁹ González Suárez 218

The Spanish Civil War proved Cuba's emotional investment in its relationship with Spain. Whether it was a sentiment of indebtedness to a parent community that had aided Cuban revolutionary efforts years earlier, or a surge of Cuban patriotism for an imagined trans-Atlantic homeland in need of defense from fascist ideals, Cuba and its people actively joined the peninsular struggle. The war, Jorge Cuadriello observes,

...De inmediato atrajo la atención de toda la sociedad cubana, que lejos de mantenerse neutral ante aquella contienda se dividió en partidarios de la causa republicana o en seguidores de los sublevados fascistas. La generalización del conflicto a todo lo largo de la geografía española y la intensificación de los enfrentamientos armados incrementó aún más la pasión política de los habitantes de la Isla.²⁰

At a time when Cuban nationalist ideals were at odds with those proposed by Francoism—more than 95% of Cubans at the time were said to have opposed the Spanish regime²¹—Cubans volunteered to join International Brigades like the Spanish Battalion and the Lincoln Brigade that fought with the Republican Army.²² Cuba contributed more Republican volunteers per head of population than any other foreign country to the Spanish cause.²³ Despite the strength of the Spanish Phalange in Cuba—considered to have been the most organized and powerful of all its Latin American factions²⁴—and their active propaganda campaigns aimed at persuading the mostly pro-Republican Spanish laborers to join their ranks, Cubans continued to fight for the reinstatement of a

²⁰ Jorge Domingo Caudriello. *Españoles en Cuba en el Siglo XX*. (Sevilla: Renacimiento: 2004) 318.

²¹ Anthony Hennessey. "Cuba," in M. Falcoff y F.B. Pike (Eds.): *The Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939*. (American Hemispheric Perspectives, Lincoln & London: 1982) 105-12.

²² Fernando Vera Jiménez. "Cubanos en la Guerra Civil Española". *Revista Complutense de Historia de América*. 1999: 25; 295-321.

²³ Hennessey 245.

²⁴ Allan Chase. *Falange: The Axis Secret Army in the Americas*, (New York: G.P. Putnam Sons: 1943) 15.

Spanish Republic at home and abroad. With the onset of World War II—which reestablished migratory flows—and the Franco dictatorship that followed in Spain, Cuba welcomed her kin as political refugees. Thus, Cuba was a safe haven for *los republicanos*, Spanish political exiles who sought refuge from a poverty-stricken and politically tumultuous post-war Spain. It was this generation of Spaniards, many of whom were intellectuals whose arrival in Cuba was fueled by political circumstances that greatly differed from their predecessors, who most influenced Cuban cultural life. Miguel Iturria explains,

Esos hombres desgarrados por la Guerra llegaron a nuestras costas con la pasión de España en la memoria, rompen los prejuicios heredados del largo conflicto entre España y Cuba que condujo a la ruptura política de 1898. Nada tuvieron en común con los funcionarios coloniales que hicieron carrera y fortuna en esta tierra. No cabe tampoco comparación entre ellos y la oleada de inmigrantes que entre 1902 y 1930, con otras razones, contribuyeron a la españolización de la Isla. Fueron hombres diferentes, intelectuales que fecundaron y que fueron fecundados, sabios cuya presencia impulsó la cultura insular.²⁵

Among the exiled poets, playwrights, authors, artists, and academics were a series of journalists, the most notable of whom was Eduardo Ortega y Gasset—brother of the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset and leader of the republican intellectual opposition under the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera—whose writings exemplify some of the most revered journalistic work in both Cuba and Spain. Given the extended years of Francoist rule, Cuba would also receive Spaniards who immigrated for economic reasons until the Castro years curbed the centuries-old process. Although it was only one of various countries in Latin America and Europe to open their doors to the exiles, Rosa

²⁵ Miguel Iturria. *Espanoles en la cultura cubana*. (Sevilla: Renacimiento, 2004) 163.

Pardo Sanz explains that the shared history particular to Spain and Cuba made the island a primary destination. She says,

En la isla concurrían factores peculiares que no aparecían en otros países: el poder económico de la colonia española; el papel del componente cultural español en el nacionalismo cubano como medio de contrarrestar la dependencia político-económica de los Estados Unidos o la vivencia de procesos políticos paralelos durante los años treinta (la revolución contra Machado y la Segunda República en España).²⁶

Like mother like daughter. The mirroring of economic, political, and cultural facets of both countries destined them to a relation of co-dependency which through thick and thin has survived dozens of government leaders, Cuban and Spanish alike, since the 1930s.

It was not until Castro's rise to power in 1959 and the eventual Marxist-Leninist direction the regime took that the familial bond between Spain (mother) and Cuba (child) could have been seriously threatened; the loyalties between the island and the Motherland, given Franco's and Castro's opposing political agendas, should have, at the very least, been challenged if not dissolved. For Spaniards living in Cuba, Castro's government represented a threat to elitist interests once it officially declared its communist leanings and resulted in the nationalization of educational institutions, hospitals, private land, industrial facilities, and personal businesses. Whereas the Spanish bourgeoisie had escaped Grau San Martín's *Ley del 50 Por ciento* a decade earlier, it was now their class and its economic interests that were targeted by Castro's communist dictates. As Alicia Alted points out, his rise to power provoked a massive return of

²⁶ Rosa María Pardo Sanz. "Antifascismo en América Latina: España, Cuba y Estados Unidos durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial." *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe*. Volume 6 : Number1 Jan-June 1995. Electronic version http://www.tau.ac.il/eial/VI_1/sanz.htm

immigrants to Spain and caused a great many others to immigrate to the United States and radically severed the possibility for future immigration from Spain.²⁷ Nonetheless, the post-colonial allegiance between countries was to remain intact. In fact, diplomatic relations between both dictators were never broken. Benny Pollack argues that the continuity of a ‘special relationship’ between Cuba and Spain is natural given their common history, irrespective of particular junctures such as changing political circumstances. Perhaps it was the *gallego* heritage the leaders shared that made the adage “blood is thicker than water” or in this case politics, the defining element of their sustained relations. Perhaps Franco interpreted Castro’s staunch anti-Americanism as a gesture of avenging the historical wound of 1898. More realistically, however, it was in Franco’s interest to maintain ties to the island because of the economic investment that Spaniards had made there over time and the promise of Cuba as a market for Spanish exports, particularly in light of the gap left by the U.S. embargo which Franco’s Spain did not support. Pollack points out that Cuba is one of two areas in Latin American where Spain’s consistency in its policy is most remarkable. He says,

It can be safely stated that Spanish foreign policy after Franco’s death, during the transition to democracy and under the democratic regime, has not been substantially different from Franco’s foreign policy.²⁸

The consistency that Spain offered Cuba would be of utmost importance for an island that from 1959 would heighten Cold War tensions between Cuba’s future European ally—the USSR—and its northern enemy—the United States. The end of the Cold War would

²⁷ Alicia Alted. “España, de país emigrante a país de inmigración”. *De la España que emigra a la España que acoge*. (Madrid: Fundación F. Largo Caballero y Obra Social Caja Duero, 2005) 41-2.

²⁸ Benny Pollack. *The Paradox of Spanish Foreign Policy*. (Great Britain: Pinter Publishers Limited, 1987) 81.

prove not only the unconditional nature of Spain's allegiance to Cuba, but the Messianic nature it was to take during the Special Period that arose in Cuba thereafter.

If Cuba's history—colonial and post-colonial alike—has never been devoid of Spanish maternalism, it also has not lacked American paternalism. The Spanish-American War of 1898 was an exemplary custody battle over a prized child—an economic and political stronghold—seeking freedom from maternal control and, with the Platt Amendment by which Cuba was governed afterward, paternal protectionism. The bilateral cultural, economic, and political connections between Cuba and the United States profoundly influenced Cuban national identity from the early 1850's until 1959. The Batista years in particular attest to the waning of Spanish cultural influence giving way to American influences in youth culture and consumerist aspirations.²⁹ As a major recipient of U.S. investments, it is said that during the early 1950s Cuba had become a showpiece for American modernity.³⁰ Louis A. Pérez, Jr. argues that the prominence of American culture in Cuba throughout that century established a worldview that secured Cuban emulation of the “American way of life”. The latter, he says,

was the principal way that Cubans entered the post-colonial order, the circumstances under which social institutions were formed and moral hierarchies established the means by which many citizens arranged the terms of their familiarity with the world at large.³¹

In fact, José Martí, considered the Apostle of Cuban Independence, influenced by the American model of independence, imagined a sovereign Cuban nation from his self-

²⁹ Joseph Scarpaci, Robert Segre and Mario Coyula. *Havana: Two Faces of the Antillean Metropolis*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press: 2000), 108.

³⁰ Hennessy 2000: 242.

³¹ Louis A. Pérez, Jr. *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality and Culture*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 11.

imposed exile in New York City, recording his nationalist thoughts in his famous letter *Nuestra América*. It was from the United States that at the end of the 19th century, the founding father of the Cuban nation mobilized the Cuban exile community in New York and across Florida to fight for independence from Spain and lobbied against American annexation of the island. It was also from New York City that Martí founded the Partido Revolucionario Cubano, the Cuban Revolutionary Party, which continues to be the ruling political party in Cuba under Castro. In fact, Castro's Revolution relied on historical memory to cast himself as the Martian (Martí) Messiah, avenger of the frustrated efforts of 1898 when American intervention in the Cuban struggle for Independence from Spain altered the possibility of a purely Cuban victory and the development of a post-emancipation national consciousness devoid of foreign influence. By merging Martí's struggles of the colonial past with his own, Castro manipulated historical discourses to deprive them of temporality by collapsing the then and now into a singular moment in time; he would fulfill Martí's hope, which he constructed as prophecy, for an independent Cuba. Obliterating the United States' paternalistic presence on the island, representative of the Batista years, was the revolution's first mission and subsequently became its prime objective into our times. Its success in keeping American intervention a mere memory is greatly due to the nationalist discourses through which the fight against the United States has been articulated. According to Benedict Anderson, all successful post-World War II revolutions have been defined in national terms. The consequences of waging this symbolic war have been substantial. First, the mass exodus of the white bourgeoisie, Golden Exiles, followed by the thousands who left via family embarkations returning from Miami during the two month opening of the Camarioca port in 1965. The ill-fated

Bay of Pigs Invasion, with its incumbent decades old economic embargo declared by President Kennedy followed, fueling the Cuban alliance with the USSR that resulted in the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. The 1960s and early 1970s also witnessed advent and halting of the Freedom Flights that reunited relatives. Then, the massive exodus of the 1980 Mariel Boatlift took place and the 1990s' Rafter (Balsero) Crisis occurred as an economic result of the dismantling of the Soviet Union. Finally, the Elian González fiasco of 2000 marked a decades long ideological war between both nations as countless bidirectional condemnations of human rights discourses have turned out to be a very long, tedious and multigenerational family feud; Cuba has rebelled against the Fatherland, lost the USSR's economic backing, and has had to turn to the Motherland for aid and support.

Hence, Cuban national identity has been a hybrid of Spanish and American cultural, economic and political parentage since colonial times whereby the United States completes the family trope here used to historicize the relations between Cuba and Spain. Although the severing of economic and political ties in the post-Castro era has banned cultural identification with the United States, its vestiges remain and Americanism continues to seep into quotidian Cuban cultural practices via communication with the Cuban Exile community that resides there, mostly in Miami. These are mostly a result of travel, legal and illegal alike, between the United States and Cuba; Internet access—although limited for Cubans—; and the care packages/ remittances regularly sent to relatives on the island. The latter are so central to this transnational relationship that it accounts for Cuba's first source of income, more than foreign investment in the tourism industry over the past decade. However, the continuum is most evident in musical forms

that have gained acceptance and praise in Cuba, most notable of which is the governmental recognition of hip-hop as a national musical genre since the late 1990s and the creation of agencies that actively promote its artists. This will be discussed in Chapter 3. It has been argued that it is the racial element of this African American genre more than its American element that has spurred its popularity and its state backing given the cultural discourses that have advocated appropriation of Afro-Cuban identity on the island since the Revolution. For an island constructed in the image and likeness of the Motherland it marked a shift in cultural and national identity. Although not new to Cuba—from 1920-1935 Alejo Carpentier and other intellectuals had spearheaded the *negrismo* or *afrocubanismo* movement that promoted identification with the African component of Cuban culture through art and literature—in the context of a Cuba that no longer received Spanish immigration and lost the majority of its Spanish community and their ancestors to exile, conditions were ideal for Castro's Cuba to reinvent its racial identity. Perhaps no other medium has been more successful in disseminating this discourse, expressing Cuban disidentification with the United States and Spain, and demonizing the history that all three share, than through the cartoon character *Elpidio Valdés*, a *mambí* who fights against the evil forces of both these countries during the war of 1898. Thus, denying American cultural parentage at the revolution's inception and later diminishing the importance of Spanish parentage through Afro-Cuban exaltation proved to be only one of the daughter island's various acts of rebellion over the course of nearly 50 years. While the United States has been stern and stood its political and economic ground, Spain's unwavering loyalty to Cuba throughout her history, and more notably through the Special Period, has proved that there is no love like a mother's love.

Regaining What Was Lost in Cuba

During the 1990s, Cuba experienced trying economic times as the collapse of the Soviet Bloc signaled the loss of the island's primary financial and political ally for nearly three decades. The Soviet absence marked the inception of the Special Period—roughly the years between 1990 and 2005—when economic necessity led the island, reluctant for decades to open its doors to capitalist ventures, to welcome foreign investment interests.³² Reversed was the staunch resistance to tourism since the revolution's rise to power and hopes were placed in this sector to rescue the ailing Cuban economy. Like a mother that tends to a child in need, Spain salvaged the Cuban economy by becoming the main provider of bilateral development assistance, one of the most important countries for Cuban imports and exports, and constituting the largest national group of tourists to the island.³³ Spanish investment also extended into the cultural production industry, most notably in signing Cuban artists to Spanish record labels and Spain's primary role in the co-production of films with the Cuban Film and Art Institute (ICAIC). Spain's newfound prosperity made these significant investments possible and are the topics addressed in Chapters 3,4 and 5. The 1990s marked Spain's presence on the global market as a potent

³² The exact years for the onset and end of the Special Period varies amongst sources but are all within the 1990-2005 range. Cuba's Banco Central understands it to have taken place for a decade, 1990-2000 as evidenced in <http://www.bc.gov.cu/Anteriores/Otros/economia%20cubana.pdf>. For Ariana Hernández Reguant author of *Cuba in the Special Period: Culture and Ideology in the 1990s* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) it ran from 1990-1999. For Esther Whitfield, author of *Cuban Currency: The Dollar and "Special Period" Fiction* (University of Minnesota Press: 2008) pinpoints its existence from 1990 until an unofficial end in 2005. Economists, sociologists and other scholars alike point to 1993 when the dollarization of the economy occurred as its inception and most agree that 2002 marks the more palpable end to the Special Period.

³³ Economist Intelligence Unit 2003.

political and economic entity given its entrance to the European Union in 1986 which ended years of economic and political isolation under Franco, and the subsequent economic boom from hosting the 1992 Summer Olympics in Barcelona. Spain has in fact spearheaded the European Union's drive to improve political and economic relations with Latin America given the historical ties, common language, and culture that bind them. Particularly in Cuba, Europe sees an opportunity to eradicate the United States' firm control over the island's economy and foreign affairs, protect its substantial investments in the island's tourist and nickel mining industry since the 1990s, and exploit newly discovered off-shore oil reserves.³⁴ Hence, Spain's history of economic interest in nurturing ties with Cuba was reinforced and the former colony once again became an anchor for Spain's influence in the international market. Clearly, José Ortega y Gasset's famous phrase still rings true, "*España es el problema; Europa es la solución,*" to which I would add, "*E invertir en Cuba la mejor opción para que España vuelva a ser lo que era.*"

Parting from the lamentation behind the age-old adage "*Más se perdió en Cuba,*" it is my contention that Spain's motherly redemptive role—saving Cuba from destitution by curing its economic ills in post-Soviet times—has granted Spain the golden opportunity to regain the imperial glory that was lost in Cuba in 1898. The grave sense of loss that this phrase conveys and its place in the Spanish lexicon are indicative of Cuba's uncontested colonial value and marks its indelible presence in the Spanish imaginary; recuperating prized economic ties with *la siempre fiel isla*, of the former colonies the

³⁴ Christian Freres y José A. Sanahuja, coord. *América Latina y La Unión Europea*. (Madrid: Asociación de Investigación y Especialización sobre Temas Iberoamericanos, 1998), Introducción.

most akin to the metropolis, rescues an imperial prestige central to Spain's reconstruction of national identity in the post-Franco, post-isolation, European Union membership era. Given the intertwined history of colonizer and colonized it is thus to be expected that the social, economic and political relations between Spain and Cuba during the 1990s and into the present are affected by their former ties. Because the history of Spain, as that of any nation, is a narrative about the continuity of a subject, both the nation and its national discourses have been constructed to reflect the continuity that fulfills a project stretching out over centuries. Spain indeed conquered the New World and achieved an imperialist stronghold over the course of four centuries that inevitably caused a sense of manifest destiny to seep into its identity as an empire. As Balibar argues, the coupling of legacy with destiny accounts for the retrospective illusion of national identity that permits the imagining of a nation at a given time as the culmination of this historical process. If losing Cuba in the Spanish-American War signaled the end of Spanish imperialism in Latin America, regaining what was lost in Cuba through the establishment of neo-colonial relations marks the colonizer's healing of a seemingly irreparable historical wound. The role that Cuba plays in allowing Spain to regain its lost glory speaks as much about necessity following the Soviet collapse as it does about turning to a nurturing Motherland whose political and economic consistency over the past century—to its benefit—has stood in stark contrast to a stern American Fatherland that has used political and economic disaffection as its primary disciplinary strategy against Castro's Cuba. The economic stronghold that Spain has over Cuba today—as the island's main provider of foreign investments and imports—allows Spain to close an unfinished chapter in the construction of its national identity. Although political, economic and cultural ties were

never completely severed in post-colonial times, it is only in light of the Special Period that Spanish investment in Cuba has been able to reach the extent it had during the pre-Castro era. In fact, it is not uncommon to hear Spaniards and their Cuban kin, who sought exile from Castro's Cuba, to transpose the phrase "*Más se perdió en Cuba*" to the losses provoked by the revolution of 1959. It is hence the Special Period—special for Cubans because it denotes the revolution's commoditization to the global market, special for Spaniards because it is the advent of an occasion one century in the waiting—that proves Spain's reincorporation into the global market, avenging a bitter historical memory, and reaffirms the special relationship between island and peninsula.

While the economic sphere has given Spain much to recover from Cuba, it was not the only aspect of their rapport that had to be re-conquered. Their mutual history over the past century illustrates the strength of familial ties; the umbilical cord was never formally detached. Nonetheless, the protagonism of Spain and the Spanish element of Cuban culture had faded since the revolution as African facets took center stage in state discourses of national identity much like they had in the post-Machado era. As Sujatha Fernandes points out, "Forms of Afro-Cuban cultural expression have historically been appropriated by the state as a way of fostering national cohesiveness, particularly during times of crisis and transformation."³⁵ Certainly the 1990s were indicative of such times and Cubans increasingly identified themselves with *lo negro* from *santería* and its practices—which flourished in sugar plantations during colonial times and gained force when Catholicism was displaced by the revolution—to appropriating hip hop and reggae.

³⁵ Sujatha Fernandes. "Fear of a Black Nation: Local Rappers, Transnational Crossings, and State Power in Contemporary Cuba". *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 12 (2003) 595.

With the proverbial phrase “*El que no tiene de congo tiene de carabalí*” at the forefront of this Afro-Cuban identity, prompting a revival of Spanish heritage and establishing its neo-colonial legitimacy has been a task for the tourism industry to conquer. Because economic adversity was at the core of the Special Period, rather than a resistance to the Spanish return there permeated a sense of gratitude for Spain’s Messianic role in the development of a booming tourist sector that by attracting over 2 billion dollars per year to the island and employing over 300,000 people, continues to drive the Cuban economy.³⁶ These investments increased Spanish visibility on the island during the 1990s, securing the resurgence of the *Sociedades Españolas* as spaces that actively commemorate Spanish cultural legacy through dance, art exhibits, and literature readings, welcoming both Cubans of Spanish ancestry and Spanish citizens who returned as investors. The Hispano-Cuban family tree was also kept alive and reflects the institutional role in strengthening cultural ties with Cuba, in that it also became common during the 1990s to name a Spanish city Havana’s trans-Atlantic sister city, as was the case with Santa Cruz de Tenerife in the Canary Islands, the Asturian city Gijón and Barcelona. Spanish universities also fostered artistic and intellectual exchanges with Cuban scholars during the Special Period, replacing the academic exchanges that had formerly taken place with the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and other socialist countries. (This is the case of the protagonist in one of the novels discussed in Chapter 6) The majority of Cubans, however, came into contact with the Spanish return through popular culture, mainly cinema. Since the creation of the ICAIC in 1959, this medium has served as a space for discourses on the nation, politics, race, and gender and the

³⁶ Ana Díaz. “España encabeza descenso del turismo en Cuba.” *El Nuevo Herald*. 19 de marzo del 2006, 46.

1990s marked the era of foreign investment in Cuban film production, mainly from Spain, to keep the industry alive. With a variety of Spanish elements—from themes to stereotypes—seeping into Cuban films, this industry has been responsible for diffusing images of the Spanish presence on the island on a mass scale, reinserting Spain and its people into the Cuban imaginary in ways prior to the revolution. Despite the various Spanish revival tactics and the challenges they pose to the nation, none has necessarily altered discourses of Cuban identity, especially not for those who identify themselves as Afro-Cuban. The revival has had more to do with restoring weakened familial associations with the Motherland.

As early as 1992 Castro himself contributed to this diffusion by fostering a sense of reconnection with Spain on a personal level. It was in that year that he had the ICAIC film his and his brother Raul's first journey to their parents' hometown in Galicia. The documentary featuring the Castro brothers and their reunion with Galician relatives—*Viaje a la semilla*—was subsequently televised in Cuba. For this stolid and militant leader to archive such a private and emotional moment that coincides with the political and economic transformations in Cuba linked to a renewed Spanish presence there, highlights Castro's resolve to lead by example. Like a prodigal child that returns to a parent in times of need, a relationship cannot be established on new grounds without resolving past quandaries. The importance of 1992 for both Latin American and Spain is not to be overlooked in the Cuban case. *El Quinto Centenario* marked five centuries since the inception of colonialism in Latin America and it was a time when relationships with Spain were being rethought and histories were being revamped. Thus Castro's journey to the seed is symbolic, on a national level, of a Cuba seeking closure for the colonial

wound without which a Cuban return to Spanish tutelage as a neo-colony would have been impossible. This proves that reconnecting with Spain—under special terms caused by the Special Period—is more than economics, more than politics, more than culture; it is personal, emotional and psychological and it cannot escape the familial trope.

In addition to recuperating economic and cultural ties with Cuba during the 1990s, Spain had to consider political realignments that would ensure affable relations between the socialist island and the Spanish democratic state. Although the divergent political stances of a Fascist Spain and a communist Cuba seemed to set the stage for eventual discord, there never was dissolution of diplomatic ties under Franco and relations only improved during the transition to democracy. History had proved that with the exception of Castro accusing the Spanish ambassador to Cuba of participating in a conspiracy against his government in 1960, there would be no instances of political disaffection between the countries. Neither this incident nor the nationalization of property instituted by Castro which left scores of Spaniards without indemnification and with little choice but to immigrate to other countries during the same decade at most provoked a kink in their political ties. The latter situation would be vindicated during compensatory accords of the 1990s. Perhaps more notable than the Franco-Fidel relation, is the Fidel-Fraga camaraderie. Despite the ideological differences between the Cuban leader and Franco's Secretary of Tourism turned president of the Galician government, la Xunta, from 1990 until 2005, it was their *gallego* ancestry that had bridged political gaps as they had for Franco and Fidel. Fraga actually accompanied the Castro brothers to the province of Lugo when they visited in 1992. As Alberto Mendoza y Gonzaga Díaz del

Río reported in a special edition of *El Diario de Cádiz* dedicated to Cuban-Spanish relations,

Fraga confesó hace unos años “estar en deuda con Cuba”, ya que el capital conseguido por su padre en la isla le sirvió para cursar sus estudios universitarios. El ex-presidente gallego también ha manifestado en alguna ocasión que considera a Castro como “un símbolo de la hispanidad y de independencia”, prueba de las cordiales relaciones que guarda con el máximo dirigente cubano.³⁷

However, Fraga’s praise of Castro never stopped him from criticizing the dictator’s political leanings and from suggesting concrete reforms that would bring the regime closer to capitalism. Judging from Spain’s role in the Cuban economy since the 1990s, Fraga seems to have made some headway. Nonetheless, Fraga’s position is reflective of Spain’s continued contradictory stance toward Cuba, offering aid to Castro’s government while advocating reform. Thus, the same relationship of antagonism and ambivalence between colonizer and colonized described by Homi Bhabha reoccurs in the neo-colonial setting. Considering Spain’s own history of despotism and isolation under Franco this attitude is not surprising.

What is surprising because it signals a political paradox is the disaffection that arose between the Cuban and Spanish governments during the latter’s socialist leadership under Felipe González. His 14 years as president of the Spanish government witnessed tensions with the Castro regime, mainly over the Cuban leader allowing members of the Basque terrorist group ETA to reside on the island. Castro’s empathy toward their separatist cause planted the seed of discord as it implied treason against the political steering of the Spanish state. In a flashback of the incidents at the Peruvian embassy that

³⁷ Alberto Mendoza and Gonzaga Díaz del Río. “Especiales: Castro” *Diario de Cádiz*, http://www.diariodecadiz.es/Especiales/especiales/castro/castro_relacionespana.htm.

preceded the Mariel boatlift of 1980, the reception of Cubans seeking refuge at the Spanish Embassy in 1990 was interpreted by Castro as a conflict of interests. With José María Aznar of the Partido Popular taking over Spain's leadership in 1996, tensions would continue to mount and his government was characterized by an unparalleled criticism toward Castro's Cuba and the subsequent estrangement it caused was interpreted as a direct threat to Spanish investment in the island. Aznar's insistence on Castro's commitment to revamping civil rights and civil liberties led him to meet with representatives of the Cuban exile community and the island community. This meeting infuriated Castro whose approach to the exile community is staunchly anti-dialogue. Mendoza and Del Río explain the outcome of that reunion:

El encuentro del jefe del ejecutivo español con exiliados cubanos y el cardenal de La Habana, Jaime Ortega, hartaron a Fidel, que decidió retirar el plácet al embajador de España en la isla para luego llamar a Aznar “caballerito insolente”. Las relaciones políticas se tensaron y los partidos de la oposición, PSOE e IU, acusaron al presidente Aznar de poner en peligro el trato diplomático amén del económico. Aquí las grandes empresas apoyaron este toque de atención ya que los intereses monetarios en Cuba son importantes.³⁸

Although Aznar's objectives in political relations with Cuba did not meet the needs of Spanish investors who wanted to increase the estimated 30% of foreign investment that Spain represented on the island by 1996, he was steadfast in his ways. Aznar met with Cuban dissidents, he spearheaded the “Posición Común sobre Cuba” policy which promoted a transition to democracy on the island, he urged Spain's King Juan Carlos not to visit the island as a symbolic gesture of Spain's political convictions and in 2003 he condemned Castro's government for executing three citizens who stole a boat in order to

³⁸ Alberto Mendoza and Gonzaga Díaz del Río. “Especiales: Castro.” *Diario de Cádiz*. (2007) http://www.diariodecadiz.es/Especiales/especiales/castro/castro_relacionspanarelacionEspaña.htm.

escape from the island. Castro retaliated by not making appearances at scheduled conferences and personal meetings with Aznar in Madrid, by accusing Spain of fueling the U.S. embargo, and reiterating his refusal to sign a letter of condemnation against ETA's terrorist tactics at the 2000 Panamá Summit. Despite these tense and trying times, Spain continued to sponsor technology, science and humanitarian aid programs to the island, proving the unconditional nature of the Motherland's support toward Cuba.³⁹

It is within this context of renewed economic, cultural and political relations between Cuba and Spain, in light of the former's need during the Special Period and latter's economic resurgence, that Cuban immigration to Spain in the 1990s must be understood.

Cubans Come Home: A Colonial Diaspora's Return to the Metropole

Immigration has been a key factor in the development of transnational relations between Spain and Cuba since the sixteenth century. Spanish immigrants populated the island first in the colonial quest for land and adventure, later as laborers in the hopes of improving an unfavorable economic situation at home, and lastly as political refugees, intellectuals among them, escaping from Fascist dogma. Millions of Spaniards made Cuba a home away from home until the end of the Cuban Republic, giving Cuba its uncontested Spanish character (among others) and its affinity for Spain. Despite the seemingly unidirectional nature of this migratory flow, Cubans have also crossed the Atlantic to make Spain their home away from home. Whether as exiles—José Martí

³⁹ Ibid

among them—, expellees, or economic immigrants, from colonial times until the present, Spain has welcomed them. In fact, Cubans were the first immigrants to arrive in Spain in large numbers, most notably after the inception of the revolution during the 1960s. Despite this fact, literature on the subject of immigration to Spain has overlooked the Cuban case or at best, in more recent works, relegated it to a mere mention within a broader discussion of Latin American immigration patterns to Spain over the past two decades. It has been argued that this omission is due to the politicized nature of Cuban immigration or the successful integration of Cubans into Spanish society. While the latter may be true for earlier Cuban groups arriving in Spain, the racial and economic makeup of the immigrants arriving during the 1990s discredits this possibility. In keeping with the arguments here presented, I contend that Cuban immigration has not been addressed within the larger scope of immigration to Spain in part because Cuba is considered an extension of Spain and thus the migratory flows associated with Cubans are not representative of the arrival of foreigners. Politics, government status, and citizenship aside, Cuban immigration to Spain seems to follow the Puerto Rico-United States model where immigration is not an accurate description of the flow of people from the island to the mainland. *El vaivén* is more exact, the back and forth movement this term implies being a result of Puerto Rico's Commonwealth status. Cuba, however, is a sovereign nation and thus immigration is the appropriate legal term for the flow of Cubans to Spain. As their influx is seemingly more natural or familial than that of other immigrants they are *domestic in a foreign sense* and their arrival in Spain although a clear case of colonial migration as understood by Grosfoguel is marked by undertones of a homecoming.

In the history of Cuban immigration to Spain, there have been three major periods of diasporic colonial migration, each the consequence of moments of political or economic crises in Cuba, which mirror those of Cuban immigration to the United States. It has been the shift in the latter's migratory policies since Castro's Revolution that have set the tone for Cuban immigration patterns to host countries, particularly Spain. American protagonism in Cuban migratory flows is merely another vestige of the colonial family feud—should Cubans go home to the Fatherland or to the Motherland? While the answer has varied for each period—the 1960s, the 1990s, and the 2000s—Spain has been more receptive of the Cuban community because it has not been as strict as the United States in its migratory laws. This was especially true during the Special Period when the toughest restrictions toward the Cuban community to date were implemented by the United States that continue to affect Cuban immigration patterns. The history of favorable migratory patterns between countries and the sharing of a common language led to Spain's emergence as a preferred immigration destination for Cubans, with Mexico as a popular alternative for similar reasons.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Cuban immigration to Mexico has been a common alternative since the Revolution, with the Yucatán Peninsula being of particular interest. Mexican statistics indicate nearly a 7% increase in Cuban immigration to Mexico between 1990 and 2000. Estadísticas históricas de México 2009 : http://www.inegi.gob.mx/prod_serv/contenidos/espanol/bvinegi/productos/integracion/pais/historicas10/Te ma1_Poblacion.pdf. Mexico has notoriously granted political asylum to Latin Americans, most notably amongst whom figure Spaniards during the Spanish Civil War, Argentines escaping the Dirty War and Chileans during the Pinochet regime. For an in-depth look at the importance of Mexico as a choice for immigration amongst Cubans, reference the following: Ana Covarrubias Velasco, "Cuba: un estudio de caso para la política regional de México en la posguerra fría," in *México ante el fin de la Guerra Fría*, Ilan Bizberg, comp. (México: El Colegio de México, 1998), Fernando Serrano Migallón. *El asilo político en México* (Mexico: Porrúa, 1998). Gerardo Arreola, "Cubanos amplían artimañas para viajar a México: En pos de visas, inventan falsos grupos musicales," *La Jornada*, 19 dic 2003 <www.jornada.unam.mx/052n1con.php?origen=index.html&fly=2>.

The Cuban migratory wave of the 1960s was defined by its political character as those who left the island opposed the socialist revolution that overtook Batista's government. Once the diplomatic relations between Cuba and the United States were broken in 1961, third countries were used as transit destinations for Cubans set on migrating there. Spain was the primary receptor of Cubans in transit, who because of the Franco dictatorship, did not settle in the Motherland. Spain facilitated the Havana-Madrid-Miami boomerang effect by granting visas to all Cubans who proved they had family in Spain. This country's willingness to serve as a springboard for Cuban immigration to the United States speaks as much about a Spain that, decades away from becoming the nation of immigrants it is today, had no immigration or asylum laws which made their action a humanitarian one, as much as it speaks to an unwavering loyalty to supporting Cuban causes, an action very much motherly. In fact, Cubans who arrived in Spain were greeted by a number of church groups, NGOs and other organizations that provided assistance with the transition to Spain or to their final destination. Of the 200,000 Cubans estimated to have arrived in Spain in this decade, 40 percent immigrated to the United States. For those who did settle in Spain, they constituted nearly half of all immigrants and exiles in the country at the time.⁴¹ Like their Miami counterparts, these political exiles were mostly educated, middle class Cubans of Spanish ancestry—approximately 10,000 Cubans arrived with Spanish passports—and their integration into Spanish society was seemingly facile.⁴² Once Spanish politics took on a socialist character with the first post-Franco democratic elections in 1977, many Cubans feared

⁴¹ Colectivo IOÉ 1993: 234-35.

⁴² Isabel García Montón García Baquero. "La emigración cubana a España, 1960-1992." *Revista Complutense de Historia de América*, Número 15: 1997, 283.

another revolution and thousands left for the United States. The 1980s marked the era of academic and cultural exchanges with Cuba and a number of students and intellectuals participating in these venues did not return to the island. The number of Cubans in Spain remained steady during that decade—an estimated 5,000—in contrast to more than one hundred thousand Cubans who arrived at Miami’s shores through the Cuba-U.S. specific Mariel boatlift phenomenon. Spain would not face a situation where mass numbers of Cubans sought asylum, a rarity compared to the United States, until 2002.

The last decade of the twentieth century in Spain is characterized by an unprecedented migratory boom that has transformed Spain from a nation that emigrates to a nation of immigrants. The country’s transition to democracy in the 1970s, its inclusion in the European Union in the 1980s, and its hosting of the Summer Olympics all contributed to Spain’s renewed prosperity and reinsertion into a global market just in time for celebrations of *El Quinto Centenario*. As the E.U.’s interlocutor with Latin American countries—given language and cultural affinities—Spain reestablished political and economic ties with the continent which spurred a trend of reverse migration from the former colonies. Likewise, Eastern European and African immigrants, legal and illegal alike have been lured to Spain by the promise of prosperity. Jesús Caldera explains this change:

Gracias a la privilegiada situación que ahora ocupamos en el mundo, nos hemos convertido en lugar de acogida, en tierra de oportunidades para personas que buscan aquí una vida mejor. Somos una nueva Ítaca, similar a la que buscaron nuestros conciudadanos en otras épocas.⁴³

⁴³ Jesús Caldera. Prólogo. *De la España que emigra a la España que acoge*. (Madrid: Fundación F. Largo Caballero y Obra Social Caja Duero, 2005) 23.

It is a phenomenon that has impacted various facets of life in Spain from the job market to the educational system and which marked a period of speedy adjustment still underway, as the immigrant population nearly doubled from 500,000 to 900,000 in the five-year span between 1995 and 2000.⁴⁴ For a country that imagined itself, under Franco, as white, middle class, and Catholic, and thus unaccustomed to functioning as a multiethnic and multicultural society, immigration continues to pose a challenge in quotidian living as stereotypes, neo-racist attitudes, and ethnocentrism continue to seep into societal relations. Such is the case that when I am in Spain, as proud as I am of my Cuban ancestry, I tend to flow with assumptions of my Canary Island origin when not in Cuban circles not only because of pigeonholing but because I have found it too daunting a task to explain my multi-hyphenated background, common for an American, to those unfamiliar with such multi-faceted identities. Because race factors into the interplay of social relations in Spain, Latin American immigrants have the advantage of claiming a shared Spanish heritage and a common language that has eased their transition in certain ways that it has not for African or Romanian immigrants. As Juan E. Cruz explains in the article “La inmigración latinoamericana en España”,

los diferentes gobiernos que han transcurrido desde la transición han venido trabajando por un acercamiento mayor entre nuestras sociedades y pueblos en todos los órdenes, llegando a observarse por parte de la población española una aceptación mayor de los latinoamericanos respecto de otros núcleos de inmigrantes.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Consuelo Rumí. “La política del Gobierno en material de inmigración y emigración”. *De la España que emigra a la España que acoge*, (Madrid: Fundación F. Largo Caballero y Obra Social Caja Duero, 2005) 641.

⁴⁵ Juan E. Cruz. “La inmigración latinoamericana en España.” *De la España que emigra a la España que acoge*. (Madrid: Fundación F. Largo Caballero y Obra Social Caja Duero, 2005) 490.

Today, the Latin American community in Spain represents 38 percent of all immigrants to the Iberian Peninsula, making it the most important minority group in the country because of its economic, political, social and cultural implications in comparison to other immigrant communities.⁴⁶

Sociological research shows that Cuban immigrants who arrived in Spain during the 1990s—most of whom identify themselves as economic refugees—do not contribute in significant ways to the potent economic force of Spain’s Latin American immigrant community.⁴⁷ This marks a stark contrast to Cubans arriving in Spain three decades earlier who were professionals and intellectuals—in their majority political exiles—who made significant contributions to the Spanish economy. Partly it is a matter of sheer numbers. Cubans only accounted for 1 percent of the immigrant population to Spain in the 1990s, reaching its peak in 1999 with nearly 17,000 Cuban immigrants.⁴⁸ During these years, the Ecuadorian community alone was five times larger and Colombians outnumbered Cubans by over 30,000 people. The trend in Latin American immigration to Spain is that of families who reestablish themselves together, while patterns in Cuban immigration indicate that these immigrants are young singles, mostly women. The latter is not surprising given the prominence of *jinetería* (prostitution and escort services) in Cuba which has been generated by the tourism industry during the Special Period. The devastating economic effects of the Soviet collapse made the tourist industry the most prolific means of attracting foreign investment and generating profits for the island.

⁴⁶ Cruz 504.

⁴⁷ Consuelo Martín Fernández. *La inmigración cubana a España*. (Madrid: Fundación de Investigaciones Marxistas, 1994) 86.

⁴⁸ According to the Spanish Insituto Nacional de Estadística at [www. Ine.es/daco42migracion.htm](http://www.Ine.es/daco42migracion.htm)

Naturally, with these investments came investors and tourists seeking a tropical paradise whose exotic women are more attractive than the plans for building the Meliá Cohíba or sunbathing in Varadero. Antonio Pérez Giménez explains:

Es conocido que en España se llegó a fletar vuelos chárter ocupados por “hombres de negocios.” Los “turistas” de mediana edad, solos y ávidos de sexo fácil y exótico se hicieron parte del cuadro habitual en el aeropuerto José Martí hasta el punto de que se inventó una palabra para denominarlos: los “turipepes” o los “pepes.”⁴⁹

Thus, it became common for Spanish men, among other European men, to facilitate immigration papers for Cuban women in dire economic need either through marriages of convenience or by trafficking them as sexual workers for gentlemen’s clubs in Spain. The latter is a topic taken up in Alexis Valdés’s *Un rey en la Habana* discussed in Chapter 5. Cuban men known as *pingueros* also partook in *jinetería*, aided by the Latin Lover stereotype and found an escape route to Spain in the same way. Some of these Cuban dandies like Dinio, rentboy of the Andalusian singer Marujita Díaz and later porn star, went on to become pop culture icons in Spain. For Cubans involved in this type of immigration as well as for the rest of those who relocated to Spain in 1990s, the most common forms of employment are as laborers in the restaurant and tourism industry and as domestics.⁵⁰ This is spite of the fact that most are university graduates. As low wage earners, these Cubans have not participated to a considerable degree in the immigrant cultural practice of sending remittances, but members of the 1990s wave are quick to save what little money they can in order to visit Cuba as soon and as often as possible. In so doing, they perpetuate the culture of *el especulador* which has become highly visible

⁴⁹ Antonio Pérez Giménez. “Turismo sexual: jineteras, pingueros y turipepes.” *Cubanet: 2000*. Electronic version: <http://www.cubanet.org/CNews/y00/jul00/03°11.htm>.

⁵⁰ Cruz 500.

during the economic shifts spurred by the Special Period.⁵¹ Thus, the reasons propelling their immigration, their options for migrating, and their opportunities once in Spain clearly distinguished members of the Velvet Exile from their predecessors and they set the tone for the stereotypical associations Spaniards made with Cuban immigration to Spain since the Special Period.

No discussion of Cuban migratory patterns during the 1990s is complete without addressing the role of U.S. policy as it concerns Cuban immigration. With the opening of the island to foreign investments the dollarization of the Cuban economy took place in 1993, direct reception of remittances on the island was allowed, and travel restrictions were lifted for Cubans living abroad. Although these events hinted at the possibility of dialogue between Castro and Washington, it would only take place in light of the *Balsero* crisis that began in August 1994. *Time* magazine's September 1994 cover, featuring a sketch of Castro in his habitual disciplinarian index finger pointing position, summarized the conflict best in its headline: *Ready to Talk Now? Castro Hopes His Flood of Refugees Will Force the US to Make a Deal*. The deal that Castro sought, or better yet had been seeking since the Carter administrations, was a significant change in U.S. migratory policies. According to Michael Kozack, who was the top U.S. negotiator in migration talks with Cuba after the 1980 Mariel boatlift and served as the top U.S. diplomat in Havana from 1996 to 1999, Cuba has demanded that the United States take in 50,000

⁵¹ *Especulador* makes reference to people who arrogantly flaunt their material possessions in Cuba—jewels, gold teeth, electronics, name brand apparel, etc. Cubans who benefitted from remittances during the Special Period stood out from others in their access to such material goods. For Cubans who have migrated, the acquisition of similar material goods is purposely displayed upon visits to the island as a sign of progress and removal from a destitute economic condition. This trend is best captured by controversial singer Candido Fabre's lyric in the song "*La Habana quiere guarachar contigo*" which says "*Para andar la Habana hay que ser especulador, el que no especula en la Habana no tiene sabor.*"

immigrants per year given the attraction of the United States for many on the island, whether for political or economic reasons, but the quota stiffly remained at 20,000 yearly visas until the 1990s.⁵² Immigration specialist Ernesto Rodríguez Chávez explains that between 1991 and 1993, the United States could have issued up to 60,000 visas to Cuban immigrants who qualified for the Family Reunification Clause but issued scarcely more than 3,000.⁵³ Simultaneously, in a contradictory stance, the United States welcomed scores of Cubans who reached the Florida shores by illegal means. Coupled with the Cuban Adjustment Act—enacted in 1966 it allowed Cubans to adjust their migratory status once in the U.S.—American migratory policy seemed to encourage illegal immigration. The suffocating situation on the island in post-Soviet times meant that a great number of people needed to leave and wanted to leave at all costs and with limits imposed on legal immigration to the United States, taking to the waters on rafts, inner tubes or any other improvised flotation device became the primary solution for more than 35,000 people in one month's time. Castro aided rafter efforts by declaring an open invitation to any Cubans who wanted to leave to do so after a series of confrontations between government officials and would-be refugees and riots in Havana reached all time highs in August of 1994. Through his action Castro not only broke migration quota agreements with the United States but vindictively challenged Washington to revamp its policies. It worked. Clinton's enactment of the wet foot/dry foot policy revised the unconditional nature of the Cuban Adjustment Act—now only those who reached American soil could stay and seek asylum—which immediately served to halt the illegal

⁵² Nancy San Martín. "Rafter Help Open Door Entry", *The Miami Herald* August 22, 2004, 43.

⁵³ Ernesto Rodríguez Chávez. *Emigración Cubana Actual*. (Cuba: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1990) 787-92.

departures from Cuba. Through the U.S.-Cuba migration accords signed in 1994 and 1995, Clinton committed to issuing at least 20,000 visas to Cuba annually, and allowed most of the tens of thousands of *balseros* who were detained in Guantanamo, after being intercepted at sea, to reach the United States. The others were rerouted to 11 countries where they were accepted as permanent residents, Spain among them.⁵⁴ Given the excessive number of Cubans who applied for exit visas subsequently, a visa lottery program was established to randomly select who, among the many seeking to migrate to the U.S. could do so by legal means. Antonio Aja Díaz estimates that between 1995 and 1999 the ‘migration potential’ in Cuba was between 500,000 and 750,000 people.⁵⁵

For those who chose not to risk crossing the 90-mile stretch between the U.S. and Cuba or who would not leave their fate to chance—winning the visa lottery—third countries became more viable options for immigration. For Cubans, Spain was a clear and facile alternative to American immigration restrictions because of their shared history and common language. Its messianic economic presence on the island during the Special Period and the resurgence of appreciation for Spanish cultural heritage set the scene for The Velvet Exile’s homecoming. Spain once again intervened in the family feud—if the Fatherland would not formally recognize and accept his Cuban kin, the Motherland would have to rescue them in their time of need. Eventually the United States took Spain up on its mediator role and through the Aznar presidency put pressure on Spain to push for reform in civil rights and establish a dialogue for political change. Due to the mother-

⁵⁴Ibid 120-132.

⁵⁵ Antonio Aja Díaz. “La Emigración de Cuba en los Años Noventa” *Estudios Cubanos* Volumen 30 2000, 9-10.

daughter bond shared by Spain and Cuba, the Fatherland calls the shots and relies on the Motherland to implement them in the daughter island. Nonetheless, the *balseo* crisis was indicative of the degree of need that Cubans experienced after the Soviet Collapse. Between 1989 and 1992 Cuba lost 70% of its purchasing power and quickly deteriorated, passing from one of the richest countries in Latin America to one of the poorest. As early as 1991 the importation of food, raw materials and manufactured products came to a near standstill as Cuba was left with few trade partners and preferential trade agreements were suspended. By 1994, Susan Eckstein explains, thousands of Cubans lost their eyesight due to nutritional deficiencies and there were such serious food shortages that Havana experienced its first riots since 1959.⁵⁶ The US embargo only hardened during this time leading to the 1996 Helms Burton Law that sought to penalize foreign investments in Cuba. Hence economic relief on an individual level seemed impossible to attain unless Cubans were directly related to tourism, sexual tourism included, or if they received a private income from relatives abroad through remittances. Although policy changes that pertained to the latter contributed to the survival of many families in Cuba, the distribution of remittances was unequal and was limited to those who had relatives that could afford to provide the supplementary income. Given the economic and racial makeup of earlier Cuban immigrant groups, especially the Golden Exile wave of the 1960s, it is white Cubans who have benefited most from this reception of money and goods. As a matter of fact, it is via remittances that many Cubans have been able to set up their own businesses like *paladares* (small restaurants) and *casas particulares* (homes with hotel-like accommodations for a part of the cost) which cater to tourists. Thus, the

⁵⁶ Susan Eckstein. *Back from the Future: Cuba Under Castro*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) 135.

Special Period has disproportionately affected Afro-Cubans and measures that have been implemented to aid the failing economy on the personal level have in fact led to a division of economic classes, however minimal, that has widened the gap between the haves and the have-nots. As a result, Helen Safa points out, the racial polarization in Cuba is now more severe than prior to the economic crisis.⁵⁷ It is therefore not surprising that the majority of people composing the Special Period migratory wave to Spain and the United States were Afro-Cubans, continuing a trend begun by the Mariel boatlift. For these Afro-Cubans and other poor and marginalized Cubans untouched by economic prosperity and without much hope of acquiring it without becoming *jineteras* or *pingueros*, immigration, by marriage or invitation, was their only choice for survival.

Invitations became strategic modes for Cubans to leave the island during the 1990s. Invitation letters written by citizens of foreign countries, mostly Spain and Russia, proved that Cubans had someone to vouch for them in the countries where they were going to immigrate and thus assured the exit permit from the Cuban government and provided the host government with assurance that the immigrant would not be a social welfare case. Given the ties that bound the former USSR and Cuba for nearly three decades, many Cubans had connections established there either through years of study in the European country or through labor related exchanges. Immigrating to Spain by way of letter of invitation from Russia became common as did the selling of these letters in order to *resolver la salida* because the entrance was legally assured. Russia did not require Cubans to have entry visas. The market price for an invitation—roughly \$100—was equal to that of filling out the visa paperwork at the United States Interest Section in

⁵⁷ Helen I. Safa. Introduction. *Latin American Perspectives* Number 25 (3), 3-20.

Havana and knowing the odds of having the visa approved in light of U.S. migratory restrictions after the *balseo* crisis, the Russian route was the sure investment. Cubans granted permission to leave then had to make travel arrangements that included a Madrid layover and once in Spain, lenient approaches to the Cuban immigrant case protected them from repatriation but did not legalize their status. These Cubans were granted a two-month grace period during which they were responsible for legalizing their situation, joining the ranks of other Latin American and African immigrants who were undocumented. This strategy worked well into the twenty-first century when in the face of excessive asylum petitions from Cubans, Spain began requiring transit visas from Cuban citizens which are difficult to obtain unless the Cubans applying for them have formal letters of invitations from accredited Spanish institutions for professional, academic, or professional exchange purposes. Again, Cubans who do not meet these categorical requirements are shortchanged on the island.

Of the Cubans who successfully left Cuba during the Special Period, forming part of the Velvet Exile, perhaps none are more deserving of claiming the moniker *aterciopelado/a* than those who left Cuba with Spanish citizenship. Considering the options here discussed that Cubans have for leaving the island, it is those who arrive in Spain with a legal status equivalent to Spaniards, with work opportunities secured by their legal status and without the binding ties of relationships of convenience, which are truly the exception in experiencing a smooth or velvety transition into Spanish life. Immigrating to a country that isn't necessarily foreign for Cubans in cultural terms but more precisely in the capitalist way of life and a consumer society with distinct class divisions, being a citizen from the start facilitates the relocation adjustment process. This

is especially true for Afro-Cubans and Cuban mulattoes who enter a xenophobic Spain, given its history of isolation, its unifying discourses of nationalism that imagine Spain as white, Catholic and conservative, and the arrival of over 4 million immigrants since the 1990s. The ethnic transformation of Spain causes fear of the unfamiliar and provokes negative attitudes towards immigrants. As Carlota Solé explains, immigrants stir within Spaniards a natural fear of foreigners, the foreign, and more concretely, ignite attitudes of condescendence, mistrust, rejection, fear and even hatred for the newcomers that lead to ethnic prejudices.⁵⁸ However, Cubans are familiar and familial and Spaniards have historically prided themselves in having created the mulatta through racial mixing on the island. Although Afro-Cubans and mulattoes do not experience racism or xenophobia in ways that African immigrants or indigenous Latin Americans immigrants do, they are subject to stereotypes associated with those created by the tourism industry—exotic and hyper-sexualized dandies and rump shaking temptresses. Thus, arriving in Spain with citizenship provides a sense of equal footing and belonging that is perhaps more psychological than it is tangible in daily living, a security blanket of sorts. There are nonetheless, as Ana María Corral point out, specific repercussions associated with citizenship or the lack thereof:

La política de inmigración ha girado en torno a la regularidad o la irregularidad. Y realmente el hecho de estar en posesión o no de una autorización para residir en España, la ciudadanía, determina la posición del inmigrante, su régimen de derechos, su posibilidad de participar en igualdad en la sociedad o verse excluido de ella.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Carlota Solé. “La percepción del otro: racismo y xenophobia.” *De la España que emigra a la España que acoge*. (Madrid: Fundación F. Largo Caballero y Obra Social Caja Duero, 2005) 585.

⁵⁹ Ana María Corral. “Trabajadores migrantes en la sociedad española.” *De la España que emigra a la España que acoge*. (Madrid: Fundación F. Largo Caballero y Obra Social Caja Duero, 2005) 634.

Besides benefiting from citizenship, for true Velvet Exiles residing in Spain, freely traveling between Cuba and Spain without restriction is a privilege that both they and their successors share. For an annual fee of 300 U.S. dollars, Cubans permanently residing abroad may apply for a *Permiso de Residencia Exterior* which grants them the right to live in a host country but to visit Cuba at their discretion. Although it is mostly granted to Cubans married to foreigners or artists who exercise their professions abroad, any Cuban who meets the requirements qualifies. According to Aja Díaz, by 1996 there were 10,000 Cuban living abroad who had received the PRE.⁶⁰ In creating a *vaivén* similar to that between the U.S. mainland and Puerto Rico but between separate nations, Castro rewards these economic refugees who have not, to the government's judgement, defected for ideological reasons as their political exile predecessors had and thus Cuba still welcomes them and their Euros with open arms. For a diasporic community marred by the impossibility of return—residents or nationals of the United States are not allowed to travel freely to Cuba or retain their Cuban citizenship as the state erases them from popular historical memory in order to resurrect them in the form of *traidores*, *gusanos*, *escoria*, *mariposas*, *marielitos*, *balseros* and *quedados*—this privilege is invaluable. For a group most aptly characterized by its disaffection for Cuban politics, its disillusionment with the revolution's promises and ideals that crumbled with the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Bloc, the Cubans who left for Spain during the Special Period do not have qualms about living their lives transnationally and they travel as often as their economic situations permit.

⁶⁰ Aja Díaz 11.

Thus, the need to leave Cuba during the Special Period, the restrictions and chance associated with American immigration, the promise of a vibrant and prosperous Spain, the security that arrival with citizenship provided, and the possibility for travel between Cuba and Spain that the PRE offered, sent Cubans into a *sacar los papeles por España* frenzy that is very much alive today. Since the 1990s, the Spanish government implemented immigration laws that greatly benefited its former colonies in Latin America by allowing its people to apply for Spanish citizenship through the claiming of Spanish parentage. The mass exodus of primarily white Cubans coupled with a large decline in infant mortality among Afro-Cubans following the institution of universal health care, results in diminishing numbers of Cubans who can claim a Spanish mother or father with each generation of the revolution.⁶¹ Hence, white Cubans and mulattoes are at an advantage while Afro-Cubans generally are not and this adds to the suffocating situation that the Special Period produced for the latter group. It is therefore mainly among Afro-Cubans that marriage or intimate relationships with Spanish women are primary venues for obtaining citizenship. For Cubans who can prove Spanish parentage and want to immigrate, they go to great lengths to find the pertinent documentation and to pay for the paperwork processing fee. My recent trips (2007 and 2008) to Miramar's Immigration Office—which services Havana and the surrounding towns—in search of my Asturian grandfather's entry documents led me to witness the incredibly long lines that formed around the corner of this office for Cubans seeking Spanish citizenship. Overhearing some conversations and participating in others it became evident that in light of the Special Period the ability to claim Spanish ancestry and going through the motions

⁶¹ Alejandro de la Fuente. *Cuba: A Nation For All*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000) 14.

of applying for Spanish citizenship really is a survival skill for these generations and not a factor in redefining identity discourses established and perpetuated by the Cuban state. As one man at the office's chaotic waiting area put it, *Por salir de aquí no te digo yo si soy español, soy lo que tenga que ser. Aquí hay que resolver*. Evidently, Spain has contributed in a fundamental way to relieving the pressure of finding other viable migratory options for a sector of the Cuban population and it is by far the most popular escape route that Cubans fathom—both those who can and those who are willing to fake it. Thanks to Spain *la gente puede resolver* and this citizenship process highlights the importance of aiding kin as it establishes familial grounds for welcoming Cubans legally to Spain. It is estimated that 2 million Cubans on the island were eligible for Spanish citizenship after the Spanish government approved citizenship for the grandchildren of Spaniards in 2008; definitely a token of unconditional motherly love.

Although the numbers of Cubans immigrating to Spain during the 1990s did not tip the scales in ways that those of Ecuadorians, Colombians and Peruvians—the groups composing the majority of Latin American immigrants—did and continue to do, the Velvet Exile wave has given much to talk about. Whereas past migratory generations have assimilated into Spanish mainstream life as a result of socio-economic and racial factors that vary with this Special Period wave, this community is more visible in Spanish cultural life than its predecessors and its contemporary Latin American immigrant community. It is, of the immigrant communities, the most kaleidoscopic in its contribution to the Spanish cultural landscape for nearly two decades. Spain is more receptive to Cuban culture—from musician Compay Segundo to author Pedro Juan Gutiérrez—than it is to other foreign cultures that have populated the Peninsula and the

Canary Islands since the 1990s. As will be argued in later chapters, the neo-racist attitudes that permeate Spanish relations with its immigrant communities seem to find an exception in the Cuban case. Although the Cuban acceptance is not devoid of stereotypes and at times racist attitudes, *lo cubano* is popular, visible and consumable because it is familiar and akin; it is domestic in a foreign sense. Cubans who arrived in Spain as a result of the Special Period, formed part of a larger history of immigration between daughter and Motherland, and marked a shift in the ways that Cuban immigrants and their culture would be perceived in Spain. Undoubtedly Spain has become an important center for Cuban diasporic politics and cultural production since the 1990s. The Velvet Exile has carved its own space in the contemporary Spanish imaginary and Madrid and Barcelona⁶²—where the majority of Cubans settled during the 1990s—has witnessed the post-colonial homecoming of its Cuban kin. It is in Madrid where the next chapter begins.

⁶² Rumí 496.

Chapter 2. Our Places, Their Spaces: Cubanized Madrid

A walk through Spain's capital city seems to erase the geographic distance between Havana and Madrid as Cuban culture proves to be a vibrant, palpable presence in Madrid's landscape. The locales that through name, function, clientele or patronage conjure images of a transplanted island culture are multiple throughout the city and give Madrid a Cubanized feel. In *El Barrio de Salamanca*—the wealthiest neighborhood of central Madrid—there are Spanish versions of Old Havana's classic Hemingway hangouts *La Bodeguita del Medio* and *El Floridita*. Just west of there *La Lupe de Chueca*, a drag show venue and bar named after the Cuban Queen of Soul—immortalized in Spanish popular culture by Pedro Almodóvar's films—is a staple of Madrid's gay neighborhood. Further west, in the Malasaña sector of the city, where the sociocultural transformation known as *la Movida* took place in the decade following Franco's death, the Cuban presence has been described by locals as an epidemic with five locales opening there within 700 feet of one another over the past decade. Walking south leads to La Latina—the oldest section of Madrid known as *El Madrid de los Austrias* or the Madrid of the Hapsburgs—where the *Bar Yemayá* Cultural Association and its artistic warehouse are found. Adjacent to La Latina is Lavapiés, a multicultural, bohemian neighborhood populated mostly by artists and immigrants since the 1980s and there one stumbles upon the remnants of a locals' bar named after the Cuban cocktail, *El mojito*. East of there, the Atocha section of Madrid houses the tropical bar *De Palo Pa Rumba* as well as the Cuban

themed discotheque *Azúcar*. Heading north, one come across Huertas—*El Barrio de las Letras* or Literary Madrid. Here, *La colonial* is among an array of cafés known for weekend shows featuring live Cuban music. In the neighboring Puerta Del Sol—where a walk through central Madrid inevitably leads as it is the city’s epicenter—a taste of Cuban culture can be found at nearly every intersection of the main street, *Calle Mayor*, between *Carretas* and *Calle de la Cruz*. Within this radius, at the heart of the tourist district, *El Son*, *Cuando Salí de Cuba* and *Cantineros de Cuba* are island-related dance venues each next door to one another that cater to crowds similar to those at the nearby *Mamá Francisca*, *Mamá Inés*, and *La Negra Tomasa*, museum-like Cuban restaurant and entertainment locales. With a couple of *botánicas* run by Cuban *curanderos* also in the vicinity, *Sol* is hence Madrid’s most Cubanized zone.¹



Figure 2.1 Madrid's *La Bodeguita del Medio*



Figure 2.2 Madrid's *La Bodeguita del Medio* (Inside)

¹ A *botánica* is a store where goods for home medical care and religious belief can be purchased. *Curandero* is a folk healer or herbalist.



*Figure 2.3 De Palo Pa Rumba
(Former Mamá Inés next door)*



Figure 2.4 Discoteca El Son (next door to Cantineros de Cuba)



Figure 2.5 Botánica La Mina/La Milagrosa



Figure 2.6 Former Bar Mojito

Traveling through Madrid's neighborhoods, walking and narrating the places visibly identified with Cuba, is a practice in mapping the Cuban cultural presence in Madrid's physical sites. It is an exercise in locating Spanish owned places that function as Cuban cultural spaces since their inception in the 1990s. This exercise aims at taking a critical look at the underlying discourses, Spanish and Cuban alike, which fueled their creation and informs the image they present to a Madrilian public. As Margaret Rodman argues, places are socially constructed by the people who live in them and know them.

These places are “politicized, culturally relative, historically specific, local and multiple constructions.”² Thus to understand the relevance of Cuban cultural spaces populating Madrid’s city grid, the places that are of interest for this analysis must be read against the historical context of a 1990s Special Period Cuba, the discourses surrounding Cuban national identity, and their intersection with the cultural, political and economic climate of a Spain that opens its doors to immigration during the same decade as well as the Spanish perception of an economically downtrodden Cuba. The popularity of Cuban culture and its respective icons, evidenced by “El Che” Guevara’s iconic stature, is not specific to Spain, but rather a global trend linked to Cuba’s entry into a free market economy during the 1990s. However, its heightened visibility in Madrid is indicative of the workings of historical memory during this decade given that unlike the Cubanization of Miami easily explained by the sheer numbers of Cubans residing there over the past fifty years, Madrid’s relatively small Cuban population does not match the overrepresentation of Cuban cultural spaces in Spain’s capital city.³ The role of Madrid as a physical place is of key importance because the central role of cities in a rapidly changing global environment must be considered. As Saskia Sassen points out in *The Global City*, the city’s relation to the international economy alters the role of the metropolis and Madrid as capital city of a country undergoing economic transformation becomes ever more cosmopolitan as immigration is fueled by the promise of economic

² Margaret Rodman. “Empowering Place: Multilocality and Multivocality.” *American Ethnologist* 94.3 (1992): 641.

³ According to Spain’s Institute for National Statistics (INE), the country is home to 1.82 million Latin American immigrants. The Spanish Census of 2001 (Censo de Población y Vivienda) reveals that Latin Americans composed 33% of Spain’s immigrant population. Cubans had the lowest number of immigrants (25,788), compared to (31,579) Dominicans, (38,532) Peruvians, (47,656) Argentines, 160,096 Colombians and 216,465 Ecuadorians. The 2011 Census reveals the Cuban population has doubled in the last decade, now at 50,765. See www.INE.es and “Extranjeros en España.” *Inerevista*. (2004) http://www.ine.es/prodyser/pubweb/indisoc03/pob_extranjera.pdf

stability. Set against this backdrop, Madrid is as Spanish as it is global, as *castizo* as it is multiethnic during the decade of the 1990s.⁴

This chapter will delve into the intricacies of urban palimpsests—Spanish places that have become Cuban spaces—in Madrid’s last decade of the twentieth century with an objective that is two-fold. The reading of geographical locales that have become Cuban spaces first aims to take a critical look at the importance of Spaniards appropriating the Cuban cultural image and selling it as a tourist gimmick at a historical moment that is crucial for the national identity and psychology of both Spain and Cuba from an economic standpoint. Secondly, the reading of physical spaces that function as sites of community gathering and cultural production speaks of the tactics, as they were understood by Michel de Certeau, used by a migrant community to claim spaces within the city itself that contest the established uses of those spaces. Thus, central to this analysis will be the theorization of space in its physicality and the way in which spaces are perceived by those who create and frequent them. Beyond its physicality as a cityscape, Madrid is important in examining the Cuban community of the 1990s because it is a third space of Cuban cultural production that complicates the hegemonic identity politics defined by a Miami-Havana binary. Madrid challenges a bi-polar model of dominant discourses about Cubanness that are constructed from strictly political standpoints and impede a dialogue between these two sites and others where alternate discourses are constructed. While informed by politics—those of the United States, Cuba and Spain, the alternate discourses Madrid’s Cuban cultural production creates are not uniformly driven by them and reflect lived experiences specific to this third geographical

⁴ Saskia Sassen. “The Global City.” *American Studies*. 41:2/3 (Summer/Fall 2000): 79-95. Castizo means pure and it is used in Madrid to refer to the parts of the city, the traditions, and the language that is perceived as being most pure or Spanish.

locale. Hence, of equal importance will be the consideration of Madrid as a third space that while culturally, economically, and in some cases politically connected to Havana and Miami, extends beyond that binary allowing for the creation of new sites of community encounters and identity formation. Here, Edward Soja's Thirdspace theory will inform the analysis as it privileges space—both in its physical sense and in how it is imagined by social actors within it—as a site of social transformation. For Cubans in Spain, Madrid offers a third space open to dialogue with the polar opposites *island/exile community*, with other centers of the Cuban diaspora, and a larger global community and it is thus a site that is in flux, as tactics must be in their race against time. Because physical space conditions experience, as Soja proposes, Madrid has offered the Cuban community the possibility of creating concrete alternative spaces within the capital city that attests to the multiplicity of Cuban experiences across the Atlantic and the implications in Spanish society of their existence and co-existence with a greater Spanish culture.⁵ Madrid is thus a space where Cuban social, cultural and political identities are being reconfigured in dialogue with Spanish national discourses about the immigrant Other. In this chapter, I analyze the commercialized spaces where a racialized Cuban cultural identity is sold; exilic spaces where politics and nostalgia freeze Cuban identity in historical time; and the artistic spaces where a Cuban cultural identity in dialogue with contemporary island culture takes on a global meaning that contests essentialist interpretations of Cubanness. This walk in the city, tracing out the constant movement through city streets and city zones is an act in remembering a Cubanized Madrid and proposes an acting-out of place, creating and representing public space rather than being

⁵ Edward Soja. *Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996).

subject to it. This individualized route exemplifies the tactics of a pedestrian, as they were understood by Michel de Certeau, to approach these places not as sites for the consumption of an image about Cuba and its culture in a 1990s Madrid. The walk to Spanish places and the walk through Cubans' spaces in Madrid's epicenter has multiple points of interest, and it is *La Puerta del Sol* where the analysis of the first space leads.

In the Heart of Madrid: Commercialized Cuban Spaces

“...Esa negra linda, camará...”⁶

La Negra Tomasa



Figure 2.7 La Negra Tomasa



Figure 2.8 Logo, La Negra Tomasa

Although la negra Tomasa earned her fame in Cuban folklore as the lauded object of affection of Guillermo Rodríguez Fiffe's 1940s song by the same title, she has become a legend in her own right across the Atlantic in Madrid's epicenter—*La Puerta del Sol*. A walk through the heart of the city's tourist district leads to the restaurant-live music venue

⁶ Lyrics, *La negra Tomasa*, song written by Grenet during the 1930s.

named after her that has become synonymous with the Cuban presence in Spain's capital and serves as a point of reference for the Cuban community that resides there. At the intersection of *Espoz y Mina* and *la Calle Cádiz* the sounds of Cuban *son* played by one of half a dozen bands on rotation for the evening penetrate the Madrilian *marcha* scene. Rare is the visitor that is not lured into *La Negra* by the promise of a genuinely exotic experience from daiquiris and mojitos to imported Cohibas. Spaniards, Cubans and tourists alike are tempted to stop at one of *La Negra Tomasa's* eight storefront windows to enjoy the tropical rhythms and the sights of those who dance to them inside—more notably the *guayabera*-wearing male staff and the waitresses dressed in folkloric gingham dresses. *La Negra Tomasa*, as a physical place, is in terms of popularity—politics and political activity aside—the counterpart to Miami's famed Versailles Restaurant in Little Havana in that it is the most visible Cuban space the city has to offer.



Figure 2.9 *La Negra Tomasa 10th Year Anniversary Banner*

Opening its doors in 1998, this multifunctional place: *café-restaurant-espectáculo* (or show) as it is promoted by its owners, attempts to transport a piece of Havana to Madrid impregnated by signifiers that in turn transports the visitor to a nostalgic, Edenic Cuba of decades past that is not devoid of reminders of a latent revolutionary present. It has been

called a museum of sorts that through framed pictures of Cuban historical figures and island scenery, knick-knacks that speak of an Afro-Cuban history and classic posters of 1950s Cuban images aims to freeze the island in a pre-Castro time. Envisioned by two Spaniards from the Burgos region of Castille while they vacationed in Cuba a year before it opened for business, La Negra Tomasa was to bring together multiple typical Cuban experiences in one space. As the owners sat by the Cathedral in Old Havana they admired the eclectic mix of Cuban musicians playing at a restaurant nestled in one corner of the Plaza, people having cocktails at a bar a few feet away, and the infamous *negra santera* luring in tourists for a quick read of their future at the foot of the Cathedral.⁷ Drawn to the notion of piecing it together under one roof, it was Madrid, where the Cuban community had already risen to over 45,000 that would witness the re-birth of that Cuban legend—La negra Tomasa—turned theme restaurant.

The construction of this place—Spanish by way of location, vision and ownership—coincided with the centennial celebration of Cuba’s liberation from Spanish colonial rule while simultaneously recalling Spain’s historical wound of 1898 when it lost its last and most prized colony. Although a mere coincidence of historic time, the symbolism behind the erection of a Spanish place that was to function as a space of and for Cuban historical memory in the geographic heart of the Motherland⁸ is an evident one that speaks of the ways in which that which was lost in Cuba a century earlier can be rescued through the edification of physical space as well as the re-creation of a cultural past present within that space. It was in 1998 that Spain celebrated *El Centenario del Desastre*—the centenary of disaster as the anniversary of Cuba’s loss has been called; it

⁷ Santera refers to a woman who practices Regla de Ocha or Santería, a syncretic Afro-Cuban religion.

⁸ La Puerta del Sol is the geographic center of Spain.

was a loss described by Cuban historian Manuel Moreno Friginals as *la huella indeleble del 1898*.⁹ Translatable in a series of ways—the indelible imprint, the indelible mark, the indelible trace—I propose to take up *the indelible scar of 1898* as not only the most linguistically fair interpretation of the phrase but also the most historically suitable one. The scar of this economic, political, cultural and psychological historical wound had the potential for healing during the 1990s when a failing Cuban economy found redemption in Spanish investment, and in a reciprocal manner Spain redeemed itself from the year of the disaster—as 1898 came to be known in Spanish history. As historian Josep Fradera points out, the loss of Cuba (and, we could add, Puerto Rico) signaled the death of a Spanish America, insofar as its direct political control ceased.¹⁰ This resulted in a need to reinvent the former imperial power as a nation, a European nation that has often negated its plurality and which has been challenged throughout its history by peripheric nationalisms (Catalan, Galician, Basque, and Andalusian) and, during the 1990s, by the immigrant influx.¹¹ Spain’s entry into the European Union after years under a fascist dictatorship that rendered it economically, politically and psychologically excised from Europe, marked a victory over a history that had impeded fully establishing its European identity. From loss of empire to European integration, Spain stands as a modern day model of the redeeming forces of historical time. After centuries of successful conquest across the Americas came the decline and loss of empire for the only Spanish speaking nation in Europe. The economic decline that followed led to political instability that

⁹ Manuel Moreno Friginals. *Cuba/España, España/Cuba Historia común*. (Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 2002). There is no fitting translation for this phrase, the closest being the indelible imprint.

¹⁰ The loss of Cuba and Puerto Rico in 1898 did not mean the end of colonial rule for Spain but rather its stronghold in Latin America. Spain continues to have exclaves on the African continent— Ceuta and Melilla. For a discussion on this topics, see *Desorientaciones: El colonialismo español en África y la performance de identidad*, trans. Josefina Cornejo. (Barcelona: Bellaterra, 2011).

¹¹ Fradera, Josep as quoted in *Más se perdió en Cuba: España, 1898 y la crisis de fin de siglo*, ed. Pan – Montojo. (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2006) 11.

ranged from monarchical, republican and dictatorial forms of government that relegated Spain to the category of least developed countries of the continent. The thirty year dictatorship under Francisco Franco shaped Spain's modern history insofar as it hindered its ability to integrate into the European Community, later to become the European Union, formed on the basis of economic stability and democratic government. After various attempts at entry, it was not until the late 1980s that Spain proved it had progressed into a European nation ready to partake in this political and economic entity. The 1992 Summer Olympics in Barcelona sealed Spain's emergence from underdevelopment to development and as a model for countries seeking a successful transition from authoritarianism to democracy. As Spain re-established economic and political influence in Latin America during the 1990s, Cuba's Special Period coincided with a Spanish revival that would prove economically messianic for the island and psychologically salvaging for Spanish historical memory. Once Spain had the resources to avenge imperial defeat, nearly a century after its occurrence, Cuba offered the opportunity to rescue the glory of colonial time. It can be said, then that Cuba itself was, with Spanish investment during the Special Period, a Spanish place economically and politically, but culturally a Cuban space, in the likes of *La Negra Tomasa* and the other locales I will discuss.

The trans-Atlantic movement from Madrid's epicenter to Havana's that occurs within the *restaurante-teatro-espectáculo* that is *La Negra Tomasa* is achieved by the production of a simulated cityscape. The Burgos natives who walked the streets of Cuba's capital, who took in the sites and sounds of the island city in the early 1990s poached on foreign territory, thus recombining elements that already existed in Cuban

culture in a way that is influenced, but not fully determined, by those elements and transporting that vision of the Cuban culture to *La Negra*. Thus, as Jean Baudrillard suggests, *La Negra Tomasa* as simulation has no referent or reality except its own.¹² The venue's museum-like character is explicable in this sense because it fuses a cultural past no longer representative of a 1990s Cuba but rather a nostalgic pre-Revolutionary Cuba with contemporary sights and sounds of the island. The movement—in historical time—inherent in piecing together the fragments of Cuban culture to represent it in *La Negra*'s space from 1930s son played only by the band to 1990s timba by Los VanVan solely spun by the disc jockey demonstrates the owners' strategy tactics for navigating within the streets of Cuban cultural history. Given the touristic vision behind *La Negra* that resorts to an accumulation of objects and images, this venue takes on the character of what Foucault termed a heterotopias—a place where all the other real sites that can be found within the culture are simultaneously represented, contested, inverted. The anachronistic superimposition of the owners' memories—the early 20th century musicians, the pictures of a late 1960s political movement, the staple Afro-Cuban *santera* of the Special Period, and the brassy sounds of a late 20th century musical form—is informed as much by experience as by the romanticism associated with socialist revolution and exposure to a post Buena Vista Social Club era of Cuban culture that relies on piecing together a collage of the vintage for authenticity.¹³ The décor at *La*

¹² Baudrillard, Jean. *Selected Writings*. (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1988). Jean Baudrillard argues that culture is dominated by simulations that have no relationship to reality, and is thus a *hyperreality*. The case of the Latin American plaza has been used to argue this idea as it is said to mask and pervert a basic reality of an indigenous presence in that space.

¹³ Juan Arcocha. *Fidel Castro en rompecabezas*. (Madrid: Ediciones Erre, 1973) 234. The Cuban revolution was the first in the world to be televised and as Juan Arcocha argues, it came to exert a powerful influence on a whole generation of young Europeans as an ideal of a 'happy revolution' that stood in stark contrast to the eastern European socialist bloc.

Negra recreate the love affair of the Spanish with Castro's Revolution—as the framed pictures of Castro, Camilo Cienfuegos and *El Che* in the Cuban countryside placed along the walls demonstrate—while simultaneously attempting to recreate what they envision as typical Cuban culture. After more than a decade of success with the commercialization of this culture—in 2008 the venue celebrated its 10th anniversary accompanied by the launching of a CD compiled by their musicians—it is evident that nostalgia is marketable and a sentimental product readily consumed. Cuban nostalgia in particular is highly profitable as the case of Miami has shown given that memory is a condition of an uprooted people that functions as a survival mechanism. However, here nostalgia does not take on a commemorative function or even a memorable one; it simply exists as a strategy for marketing a product that is multi-faceted: *teatro-espectáculo-restaurante*. Thus, the Burgos two responsible for *La Negra*'s presence in Madrid have shed their tactics for strategies, as they were understood by Michel De Certeau, and thus dictate the ways in which the Cuban image is portrayed and made available to tourists, Spaniards and Cubans alike who walk by the intersection of Espoz y Mina and la Calle Cádiz.¹⁴

¹⁴ Michel De Certeau. "Walking in the City". *The Practice of Everyday Life*. (Berkeley: University of California Press: 1988)

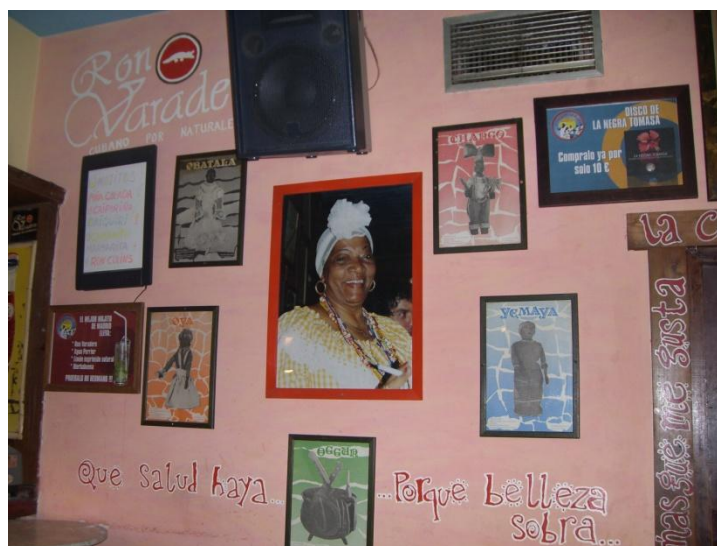


Figure 2.10 Inside La Negra Tomasa (Note promotion of 10 Year Anniversary CD)

Part of that image, and perhaps even more attractive and alluring to passerby than the music and an escape to the tropics is the presence of *la negra* Tomasa herself—an older, robust black woman from the Las Villas region of the island who, dressed in folkloric garb and adorned with multicolored beads, is unmistakably the prototypical *santera* of the Afro-Cuban Regla de Ocha religion. Whether she is making her rounds amongst patrons, dancing to the tune of her theme song alongside the band or engaged in a deity—mediated tarot reading in her *Esquina de los Orishas* (see Figure 2.11) at the entrance of the locale, it is the figure of *la negra* that authenticates the Cuban experience. *Esa negra linda* has indeed, as the lyrics of Fiffe’s song asserts, cast a spell with her *bilongo* over Madrid itself. *La negra*, whose real is María Eulalia, is a celebrity in the capital. She has been on numerous television programs documenting the Cuban presence in Spain, she has been featured in the music video for the late Spanish ballad singer Rocío Jurado’s song “Caribeño”, and her picture alongside famous Cuban artists of the Madrilian diaspora like comedian Alexis Valdés and hip hop group Orishas have filled the pages of Spain’s *Marie Claire*. María Eulalia is thus a professional Cuban—her livelihood

depends on her performance of Cubanness and it attests to the performativity or buffoon-like character of the Cuban in Spain. Just as she plays the part of *Tomasa* she is the face of a neighboring Cuban restaurant/live music venue named Mamá Francisca, after the deity associated with the Afro-Cuban *espiritismo* cult.¹⁵ She is one of a number of Cuban immigrants of the 1990s wave that have had to rely on their national identity to find work as salsa instructors, performers, and entertainers. In an interview, she confessed that she never imagined her negritude would be her claim to fame in Spain. Having been a regular at *La Negra* when it first opened in 1998 and later working in the kitchen as the main chef, she was approached by the owners who said that what the locale was missing was a typical Cuban woman of her physical demeanor: heavy set, voluptuous, and most importantly, black. They needed her to resemble the logo for the locale featuring a robust black woman—dressed in a flowing white dress and white head kerchief, and wearing *santería* beads—singing into a vintage ribbon microphone of the 1930s to the tunes of a musical trio, dressed in guayaberas, in the background. Although María Eulalia does not sing, she compensates that part of her act with Cuban dancing and tarot card readings, leaving the musical aspect of entertainment to young Cuban musicians most of whom also arrived in Madrid during the 1990s.

¹⁵ According to Wikipedia, espiritismo is the [Latin American](#) and [Caribbean](#) belief that [good and evil spirits](#) can affect elements of [human life](#). *Espiritistas* (Espiritismo practitioners) communicate with spirits in a gathering of like-minded believers. Called *misas*, these sessions are somewhat akin to the [séances](#) of American-style Spiritualism of the 19th to the present. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Espiritismo>



Figure 2.11 María Eulalia, “La Negra Tomasa” at her spiritual consultation hour at La Negra Tomasa



Figure 2.12 María Eulalia as “Mamá Francisca”. Storefront of Mamá Francisca Restaurant in Madrid

It is thus the racial difference that *la negra* represents that makes for a selling point—black is tropical, exotic, and attractive to the consumer. As a result, the most popular Cuban face in Spain’s capital city is that of a black woman. Herein lays the *teatro-espectáculo* dimension of *La Negra* as a stage where María Eulalia—although an Afro-Cuban woman ordained in the *santería* religion—plays the role of a *santera*, la negra Tomasa. It is to this theatrical space that the owners attribute the success of their business given that *La Reina de Cuba*—a Cuban restaurant and dance space—already existed in the Viso section of Madrid by 1998 but it lacked the entertainment aspect that has made of *La Negra* the place of reference for a typical Cuban experience in the city. Hence the spectacle that is put on within the walls of *La Negra Tomasa*—by the character of María Eulalia, the staff dressed in traditional costumes, and the musicians—recreates a fictitious microcosm of Cuban culture in Madrid that becomes representative of an entire community that further broadens the gap between the Cuban immigrant and his Spanish counterparts in Madrilian society. As Guy Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* suggests,

The spectacle presents itself simultaneously as all of society, as part of society, and as instrument of unification. As a part of society it is specifically the sector which concentrates all gazing and all consciousness. Due to the very fact that this sector is separate, it is the common ground of the deceived gaze and of false consciousness, and the unification it achieves is nothing but an official language of generalized separation (2).¹⁶

La Negra Tomasa as a space for the Cuban spectacle comes to represent all of Cuban society on both sides of the Atlantic and more specifically the part of that society residing in Madrid, making it the focal point of the Cuban community from both a Spanish perspective and for that of Cubans who are sold on the idea or are indifferent to it. I was one of the formers when I was living there, prior to having visited the island, and seeking a Cuban space to bridge the overwhelming distance between Manhattan and Madrid. As the visible part of the Cuban community that this venue has become over the past decade, it is thus the space upon which the Spanish gaze is fixated, where it draws conclusions about a community that through the very existence of the venue and its theatrical aspect pigeonholes the Cuban community as one that is limited to its exotic, racially marked facet; Cubans *are* a show and *put on* a show *for* show. Thus being Cuban becomes an act meant to entertain a larger societal audience and that community is trapped behind the mask of the spectacle. The false consciousness about the Cuban subject serves to further alienate him/her from the host city, intensifying the degree of difference between the immigrant and the native. The project of unifying Cuban culture in that one space in effect achieves a disjuncture with the culture and society beyond that physical place, *La Negra Tomasa*. By becoming characters of their own history as a community in Spain's capital city, María Eulalia and her coworkers are relegating the definition of that Cuban community to the investors of a business dedicated to selling the fictitious Other. As the

¹⁶ Guy Debord. *Society of the Spectacle*. (London: Aldgate Press, 1994).

cultural gap between Spaniard and Cuban widens, as the Cuban is increasingly aligned with the periphery, the more conceivable it is for a people adjusting to the changes of a multicultural and multiethnic Spain to revert to a neo-racist rhetoric of insurmountable cultural differences. For the Cubans who have sought a locus of community building in such a commercialized space, it indeed proves to provide nothing more than a false consciousness of Madrid's Cuban community and of the meaning of Cubanness for the immigrant subject in said city.¹⁷

More Mammies: *Mamá Inés*, *Mamá Francisca*, and *La colonial*

La negra Tomasa as an iconographic cultural image, Jerome Branche point out in “*Soul for Sale?*”, is just one of several Cuban *negras*—reminiscent of the masculine, desexualized Mammie of the U.S. racist imaginary—whose caricaturesque figure has been used to sell the Cuban image in Madrid.¹⁸ *Mamá Inés*, *Mamá Francisca* and *La colonial*, three restaurant/live show venues in the tourist sector within walking distance from *La Negra Tomasa*, are Spanish owned businesses that by relying on images of recognizable Afro-Cuban female cultural icons for their selling point directly reference the colonial and neocolonial periods of the nation's history. Perhaps this is most evident in *La colonial* whose feminine article *la* hints at its function as the defining element of an

¹⁷ It was a venue to unite Cubans but now with cover charges and strict entry policies in effect at the door it is more than anything tailored to tourists.

¹⁸ Jerome Branche. “Soul for Sale? Cuban Counterpoint in Madrid” as seen in Joseph A. Young and Jana Evans Braziel, *Erasing Public Memory: Race, Aesthetics, And Cultural Amnesia in the Americas*. (Macon, Mercer University Press: 2007) 158.

omitted *negra, la negra colonial*, in its name. A robust Afro-Cuban woman of exaggerated physical features in the likes of *La Negra Tomasa*—bright red *bembas*, excessively black skin, and the bright yellow head wrap—is the face of this locale and underscores the caricatured intention of the Cuban image.¹⁹ Thus, along with their image, the significance of the names of these establishments must be noted as they evoke what Branche calls “a generic, folkloricized Afro-Cuban woman, in her multiple aspects in the sexual and social economy, as slave and domestic worker, but also as the unmistakable performer in the postcolonial world” of Madrilian entertainment.²⁰ As an icon in the national imaginary, *Mamá Inés* is portrayed as an exoticized black dancer with microphone in hand, in the likes of *La Negra Tomasa*, who was simultaneously symbolic of good times and a festive atmosphere.



Figure 2.13 *Mama Inés Café* in Chueca Neighborhood

Mama Inés became part of Cuban popular culture as the protagonist of a classic of Cuban musical history—Eliseo Grenet’s 1927 song “Ay, Mamá Inés.” Although it is uncertain whether the inspiration for Mamá Inés was the character of Dolores Santa Cruz in Cirilo Villaverde’s 1882 novel *Cecilia Valdés*, what is certain is that Mamá Inés was an African slave. Belonging to the colonial world of forced labor, this older Congolese

¹⁹ Bemba is the word used to describe thick lips associated with Afro-Cubans or Cubans of mixed descent.

²⁰ Branche 167.

woman commences the song—in a fashion described by Anselmo Suarez Romero's nineteenth-century novels—asking her master's permission to sing and dance while the slaves work: *Aquí estamos to' los negros /que venimos a rogar/ que nos concedan permiso/para cantar y bailar*. Mamá Inés—who pauses between dance steps to blow tobacco smoke into the air so as to scare bad spirits away as dictated by African rituals—is remembered for her love of black Cuban coffee which she manages to sip between work chores, dance, and spirit chasing. She thus dances her way into Cuban cultural memory—immortalized in a Cuban playground rhyme—via the chorus that says: *¡Ay Mamá Inés, ay Mamá Inés/ todos los negros tomamos café!*²¹



Figure 2.14 Bar La Lupe de Chueca



Figure 2.15 Bar La Lupe de Chueca (storefront)

Although this famous declaration may have been specific to a social group in colonial Cuba, the act described is universal. Madrid, like any other European city, is home to a host of cafés, including Café Mamá Inés. In Madrid's Chueca area, a short walk from the bar/restaurant on Sol Street that also uses her name—and located across the street from the bar *La Lupe*—this café functions no differently than any other but is an

²¹ The Cuban nursery rhyme says: "Cachumbambé, Cachumbambé, la vieja Inés que fuma tabaco y toma café."

attention grabber because of its name. Far from freezing Cuban historical time within its walls, it does not purposefully (mis)place a live Mamá Inés character in a space that would not have been hers to occupy—socially or economically. Although this café's only connection to the island is its name, it is nonetheless relevant to the discussion of the commercialization of the Cuban image and its familiarity for the Spanish imaginary here discussed. It is worth noting that the locale's logo does employ the same type of calligraphy used in *La Negra Tomasa*, *Mamá Francisca*, and *La colonial*: festive and with a hint of movement. Owned by a Spaniard from the Canary Islands, the business was named after the very Cuban song for which Mamá Inés is known, after the owner heard the piece in a Havana plaza in the early 1990s when he was vacationing there. Despite the fact that his mother's name is Inés, it was the association of coffee with the Cuban flavor—a place that would be distinct from countless others in a capital city by its reference to a seemingly recognizable Cuban figure—that decided the name. It is difficult to draw the line between Mamá Inés being recognizable because she forms part of the canon of tourist gimmicks that Cuba itself reverts to selling in the 1990s when Spaniards like this proprietor were there and Mamá Inés being a cultural referent engrained in the Spanish imaginary from a shared historical past. What is decipherable is the assumption that the name would evoke a trans-Atlantic connection between drinking coffee in Madrid and doing so in Havana at the same moment in time, a time submitted to the confluence of the past and the 1990s present that has placed Mamá Inés—as song or character—in a 1990s Cuban coffee shop for a Madrilian public. Although this *Mamá Inés* does not use an image in the likes of the other gendered Cuban spaces, its logotype does feature a servile woman—tray in hand—whose voluptuous silhouette is outlined in

the same bright red, yellow, and blue colors as those aforementioned. It is obvious, from the sketched feminine figure that exaggerates the rear of the body and the woman's hair that this is not the owner's mother but rather what hints at a racialized image.

As cultural icons and as a commercial advertisement for a Cuban space in Madrid, *Mamá Inés*, *La Negra Tomasa*, *Mamá Francisca* and the black woman of *La colonial*, Brenche highlights that the use of the Cuban Mammie as the image of Spanish places does seal the Afrotropical legitimacy of these establishment, making it a Cuban space. Likewise, the real life *negra Tomasa*—María Eulalia—legitimizes the small-scale Cuban restaurant and bar in the neighboring Huertas, *Mamá Francisca*. Such has been her popularity in Madrid as the face of the Cuban community and its spaces that while the owners of *La Negra Tomasa*, *Mamá Inés*, and *La colonial* have reverted to caricatures of female Cuban icons, the owners of *Mamá Francisca* use a photo of María Eulalia to legitimize their business. Here, it is noted that María Eulalia has in fact incarnated the Afro-Cuban Mammie beyond the place and the space where her persona originated to thus represent the typical Cuban woman in Madrid. She has thus become the impromptu face of the Cuban community in Madrid since 1998. *La Negra Tomasa*, *Mamá Francisca* and *Mamá Inés* and *La colonial* are Spanish places functioning as Cuban spaces that become a composite of images, not devoid of material referents, by which the Cuban community is represented. The constructed Cuban identity that results from these images—sold at physical spaces—can be traced to vested Spanish economic interests and racial discourses about the Other, as well as Cuban community politics in Madrid. Images that revert to a colonial reality reinforce as well as reflect established configurations of

Spanish economic and social power in the post-colonial metropolis of the 1990s, mirroring a power exercised in colonial Havana of a century past.



Figure 2.16 Entrance, *La colonial*



Figure 2.17 Drink Menu, *La colonial*

Using the black woman's face as the recognizable symbol for Cuba in these Madrilian places is what Branche calls "a commercialist act of signifying" that speaks of a historically rooted European gaze upon island culture where racial dichotomies born of the colonial relationship between Cuba and Spain continue to dominate discourses about the former in the eyes of the latter.²² The black woman occupies one half of an imperial binary where slave is the completing element that exists in contrast to the white, male, master. The opening of *La Negra Tomasa*, *Mamá Francisca*, *Mamá Inés* and *La colonial* in Madrid by Spaniards a century after Cuba gained its independence, recreates a model of economic exploitation where that binary is alive and in place in selling the image of Cuban Otherness as the polar opposite of the European. All of these black Cuban female icons are being worked, literally and metaphorically, for a profit in Madrid, reverting to a dominator/dominated dichotomy where the black Cuban woman's image is manipulated

²² Branche 158.

by the European economic power. As Vera Kutzinski points out, black women were unmistakably linked to physical labor and were dehumanized within the framework of slavery to the point where they were seen as breeding mares whose sexual allure was markedly absent in comparison to *la mulata*.²³ The importance of *la mulata*'s historical space in Cuban culture and the ways in which it complicates this black/white dichotomy will be addressed in the following chapter. Thus, Francisca and Inés are slaves because of their blackness and slaves to their Cuban blackness, recast in the role of the exploited Cuban woman that colonial history laid out for them in a trans-Atlantic mirroring of that colonial past recreated in Madrilian places. In this recreation, colonial glory is rescued as the Spanish reclaim the power over a historical moment lost represented by *la negra* who, as cultural symbol, exemplifies the workings of what Antonio Benítez Rojo has called a repeating island. The images of *la negra* and a the colonial past she represents take on significance independent of their base in historical fact to illustrate the construction of the Cuban in Madrid. Evident—Brenche contends—is the subtext of power, and of the socio-racial distribution of goods and of labor in the play of racial symbols present in these establishments. Black women are tied to negative stereotypes in the national and extranational context and it speaks of how deeply race is engrained into the fabric of neo-colonial relations.

²³Vera M. Kutzinski. *Sugar's Secrets: Race and the Erotics of Cuban Nationalism*. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993) 30.



*Figure 2.18 Entrance, Mamá Francisca
(note Mammie in window)*

Gender is equally woven into that fabric and thus the ways in which space and gender intersect in *La Negra Tomasa*, *Mamá Francisca*, *Mamá Inés* and *La colonial* must be examined. These Cuban spaces are gendered spaces—locales that the host culture has invested with gendered meanings—used to sell the Cuban image whether to the tourist or to the local that inadvertently informs Cuban cultural identity in Madrid. As Shirley Ardener argues in her book *Women and Space*, “the organization, meanings and uses of space express the hierarchy of social structural relationships and ideologies encoded in it.”²⁴ By reproducing asymmetrical gender relations of power and authority, the European male appropriating the Afro-Cuban female image for profit, these Spanish places make reverting to the colonial relationship a possibility within physical places. *La negra*’s face, a cultural and racialized image and the transnational message it conveys in a period of late global capitalism must be contextualized within nostalgia for past racial orders in Cuban and Spanish national identities that are directly linked to the economic climate of the Special Period. The failing economy of the Special Period in Cuba resulted in the

²⁴ Shirley Ardner. *Women and Space*. (New York: Berg, 1993) 9.

state's international promotion of Cuban culture as a means of attracting tourism and foreign investment. While that increased the chance that artists had for travel outside the island and thus contributed to the large number of musicians and dancers taking up residence—legally or illegally in countries like Spain—it also linked Cuba and Cubans to the spectacular. Being Cuban in Spain during the 1990s (and presently) took on a performative facet—Cuban as particularly synonymous with dancing and singing—that contributed to the ease with which to sell Cuban culture as a lively, continuous *huerga*. Selling Cuban culture is a precedent established on the island that travels to Spain with Spaniards who partake in the tourism boom of the 1990s and recreates what they experience as tourists. In places like *La Negra* where experiences are superimposed, Cuban culture is being neatly packaged for consumption in ways similar to Havana's tourist industry of the period where, unlike Miami, emphasis is placed on Cuba's blackness. It speaks to a postcolonial nostalgia for a late global capital revenant of Spain's own colonial period in Cuba. Thus the historical ties between Spain and Cuba warrant a reading of race—how the appropriation and commercialization of Cuban negritude figures into national and nationalist projects through cultural and monetary capital. The dominant subject speaks about the Cuban “Other” through images that as signifiers hide the very absence of the silenced group, of those oppressed by a lack of access to official discourse and language.

A walk through the city leads to another Cuban space that although not as visible as those examined in the preceding section, does present a face of the Cuban community that is not racially Othered and in dialogue with the Spanish national imaginary and the official discourse on Cuban identity in Madrid. This is the exilic space.

Rumbo norte(en Madrid): Cuban Exilic Space

“Oye, dice que se va, rumbo norte...”²⁵

Throughout Cuba’s migratory history, the notion of heading north or *ir rumbo norte* has dominated discourses about Cuban transnational movement, particularly over the past five decades, as it refers specifically to a journey from the island to the United States. *El norte* is thus a politically, culturally, and economically charged synecdoche for a geographic place, 90 miles north of Havana, that is the quintessential Cuban space—exilic Miami.²⁶ It has been, since the onset of Castro’s Revolution, the point of reference for Cubans living on the island and abroad. Once in Spain’s capital city, it is also precisely north of the Madrid’s epicenter that one come across a less visible Cuban space—that of the exile community. Thus, walking *rumbo norte* from *Sol*, toward the Alonso Martínez zone of the city, and stopping at building number 8 on Orfila Street proves to be a movement, in the likes of migratory discourses, from the centralized Cuban space of tourist-oriented restaurants and bars and cafés to the Cuban exilic space.

Based in an architecturally grand Spanish building adjacent to city’s financial sector, the first floor of the Orfila Street structure is the physical place for weekly gatherings of *La Fundación Hispano-Cubana*. A non-profit organization representing a cross section of the Cuban exile community in Madrid and other cities worldwide that support the transition to a Castro-free, democratic Cuba, the FHC is the Spanish chapter of Miami’s Cuban American National Foundation—the largest Cuban organization in

²⁵ “El bombo,” Orishas. *El Kilo* 2005. Rumbo norte translates to “heading north.”

²⁶ Silvia Pedraza’s sociological work on the Cuban exile community has shown that Miami is the exilic capital of the Cuban community abroad.

exile.²⁷ The organization serves to convoke Cubans of a determined political leaning to come together in a Spanish building whose Cuban nature is visible only to its members and invisible to the rest of the city. Thus, in stark contrast to the hypervisible Madrilian tourist spaces previously examined, here the producers of Cuban social space are in fact the social actors within that space, at once the creators of discourses about Cuban exilic identity in Madrid and those who appropriate them. Here, the power to define Cuban cultural identity is in the hands of Cubans themselves, who having clear political leanings, exercise the authority to “other” fellow Cubans within the Madrilian community, not on the basis of race as the Mammie images have shown, but rather on the basis of a pro—or anti-Revolutionary rhetoric. The articulation of Cuban identity formed and performed at Orfila Street is linked to a political stance that is largely intolerant of those who veer from a strict understanding of anti-Castroism in defining themselves as political exiles. As a group they are quick to distinguish themselves from *el exilio light* or *el exilio rosa* and *los aterciopelados*— thus adding to the lexicon of monikers that either government or community imposed, have catalogued Cubans since the onset of the Revolution in 1959.²⁸ This naming process is part of a long history of practicing inclusion and exclusion within the community as a mechanical way of dealing with Cubans whose subject positions differ from their own, which has been thoroughly documented in Silvia

²⁷ Information provided on the Cuban American National Foundation Website:
http://canf1.org/artman/publish/about_us/index.shtml

²⁸ The terms *gusanos* (worms) and *acomodados* (those who were accommodated) have been used to describe the first wave of Cuban exiles who left the island during the 1960s and 1970s. As proclaimed exiles they were considered worms for committing treason against the revolutionary government and given the favorable U.S. laws that allowed Cubans to ease into American life, they received special accommodations to ease the transition. Once unrestricted travel to Cuba was restored in the 1990s, this group was labeled *mariposas* (butterflies) and *traedólares* (those who bring dollars) because they returned to Cuba as tourists with money for relatives. The other two major waves of Cuban immigration to the United States were the *marielitos* (those who arrived via the Mariel boatlift of 1980 and who were haunted by the stigma of belonging to a criminal and mentally unstable class) and *balseros* (rafters who risked their lives by crossing the 90 mile stretch between Cuba and Florida on homemade rafts following the onset of the Special Period).

Pedraza's work on Cuban migration to the United States. The *rosy* or *light* exile refers to political exiles with a less than extremist anti-Castro rhetoric. They are said to idealize the Revolution in its principles but disagree with its economic base and that propels their flight from Cuba without breaking political ties. *Los aterciopelados*, or the Velvet Exile, is understood to include Cubans who benefit from laws introduced in the 1990s that allowed Cubans to live abroad, keep their homes on the island, retain Cuban citizenship, and return to Cuba every 11 months, thus paying the government an annual fee to retain their Cuban passport and Cuban homes. They are thus considered Cuban residents abroad for all legal purposes in Cuba. It is the wavering stance that both groups take in comparison to the exile's unwavering politics toward Cuba defined by the break with the state that clearly delineates those who can and those who can not be considered Cuban exiles in Spain. Unique to Madrid's Cuban exile community is the recycling of the term exile in naming the 1990s wave of Cuban immigrants—although with markedly different undertones—that left Cuba for Spain. Whereas in Miami the group of Cuban immigrants that arrived there during that decade were called *balseiros* or rafters in keeping with the means by which they reached Florida waters, in Spain their immigrant condition was erased by the political undertones of the term. Far from providing an umbrella term under which all Cuban exiles across varying generations and point of arrival to Spain could be placed, it proved to be not only divisive but discarded as a proper way of describing this wave of Cuban immigrants. Hence, the favoring of rosy or light exile by the Cuban exiles of generations past to describe the Velvet exile. The Cuban immigrant community of the 1990s that is the focus of this dissertation is not represented within this Cuban space, but

is relegated to representations in tourist spaces and left to create their own spaces and respective cultural discourses, to be examined later in this chapter.



Figure 2.19 Inside La Fundación Hispano-Cubana

The labor proposed by *La Fundación Hispano-Cubana* is one that has been undertaken in Madrid for over three decades before its birth in 1996. The self-proclaimed Cuban exile community has been a palpable presence in Spain since the 1960s for the same reasons that fueled the Cuban influx into Miami during that decade—political discontent with Castro’s Revolution. These Madrilian exiles are white, middle-class Cubans most of whom are descendants of Spanish migrants to Cuba turned businessmen for whom exile in Spain was a seemingly facile process due to family ties and linguistic commonality. Among these exiles are the founder of *Telepizza*—the first national pizza delivery chain—and now president of the Spanish telecommunications company *Jazztel* and the founder of the country’s leading department store *El corte inglés*.²⁹ For this exilic

²⁹ Telepizza is the top selling national fast food company in Spain. *Invertia*. (Nov. 8 1999) <http://www.invertia.com/empresas/noticias/noticia.asp?idDoc=31183&idtel=RV011TELEPIZ&span=&idNoticia=31183>

group, their staunch anti-communist sentiment resulted in their relocation to Franco's Spain. Their position toward Castro's Cuba closely mirrors that of Miami's exile community, rejecting the island's discourses on nationalism and national identity in favor of a politically based counter-nationalism and exilic identity tied to the host nation. Although the visibility of this sector of the Cuban community in Spain does not reach the magnitude of the Miami exile community—mainly because the Madrilian exiles have assimilated into Spanish life—their social practices and creation of Cuban spaces for the purpose of community gathering is nonetheless notable. The first exilic Cuban space created in Madrid dates back to 1966 when Madrid's Centro Cubano de España was founded, modeled after the Spanish Societies in Havana mentioned in chapter 1. It is worth noting that categorizing this social gathering space for Cubans as the center in Spain speaks about the importance of Madrid for this community. It was not in Galicia or Asturias where the main center was built, but rather in the capital city of Madrid, although there are other Cuban centers in these regions of northern Spain that coincide with the high numbers of Cubans who immigrated there. It is as if this Madrilian center was representative of the Cuban community in the Peninsula, a trans-Atlantic Havana. *Centro's* work has revolved around providing different forms of aid to ease the transition into Spanish life in an effort to mirror the immigrant ethos of Havana's Spanish Societies. Nostalgia for a historic time of years past in a place across the Atlantic shaped their mission as an older Cuban generation attempting to freeze time in a pre-Castro era. Unable to maintain the interest of subsequent generations, *El Centro* is more known nowadays for its second floor restaurant, a museum to pre-Revolutionary Cuba located in the Salamanca neighborhood of Madrid. The *peñas* or literary circles that the members of

Centro instituted at cafés across Madrid aimed at generating discussions about Cuban history, society or culture are still held, although not advertised openly, limiting its participants to an insider's circle.

Given the history of the Cuban exile presence in Madrid and the places they established for community functions, my analysis turns to the importance of *La Fundación Hispano Cubana's* belated creation in the 1990s, as a political Cuban space in Madrid. At the end of 1995, the FHC was in the works, finally establishing its participation in the Cuban exile battle against communism on the island in November of 1996. Its inauguration coincided with the Velvet Exile's increased arrival in the capital city that year and with pertinent political changes in Spain. Its historical timing follows a precedent established by its Miami counterpart which did not come into being as an exilic entity until 1981, after the Mariel boatlift took place on Florida's shores. That pattern here established is of a Cuban exile community threatened by a new wave of immigration that challenges the rhetoric by which they define themselves.³⁰ The new face by which the Cuban community in Madrid is to be represented—an economically disadvantaged black or mulatto immigrant removed from bi-polar political leanings—contests the community imagined as white, middle class, and assimilated into Spanish life. It speaks about the effort by a community to rescue the space of the exile and all that identity entails in the Spanish imaginary, preventing the images of a racialized, economically downtrodden Cuban immigrant to trump that of an assimilated, successful, white middle class political exile. Preserving the image of the Cuban exile is central to perpetuating the myth of sociocultural homogeneity and political cohesiveness that has dominated Cuban

³⁰ Marielitos were considered economic refugees and thus challenged the political posture of exiles. It was thought they were mostly social deviants expelled from Cuba because they were undesirable. The *marielito* has thus become the stereotype for a low-class Cuban immigrant in Miami

extranational discourses since the 1960s. Denying the changing face of the Cuban immigrant is an act of the war on memory that by extension renders the Revolutionary project illegitimate in the constructions of Cuban identity outside the island. In favoring a nostalgic idealization of a Republican past, constructing the myth of a unified exilic community devoid of multi-generational voices within national Spanish space signals deliberate acts of what Tzvetan Todorov has termed “abuses of memory”.³¹ These abuses propel the exilic project where racial and economic politics, like those evident in Miami during the 1980s, are at the forefront of a political battle intent on upholding the image of the Cuban success story, Cubans as a model minority group.³² Here, the exilic psychology seeks societal exceptionalism by the host nation in a positive sense that unlike the negative image of Cuban blackness for sale in Madrid’s tourist district, points to a community that is an exceptional one that far from representing the periphery meshes with its national core.

The salvaging effort the *Fundación* demonstrates extends into the community’s nationalist project as renewed Cuba-Spain relations hinted at the favoring of open dialogue with the regime during the 1990s. Potentially, exilic efforts to support dissidence within the island could be dismantled, hindering the hopes for an internal transition to democracy, in the face of the island’s economic liberalization. While Cuba fought a “wartime siege economy” as the government euphemism for that decade denotes—Special Period in Times of Peace—the Madrilian exile, via FHC, fought the

³¹ Todorov, Tzvetan. *Abusos de la memoria*. (Barcelona: Arlea, 1995) 49-55.

³² Sheila L. Croucher. *Imagining Miami: Ethnic Politics in a Post-Modern World*. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997). Describes public discourse about the Cuban exile community in Miami as one that due to its economic and political activity as well as their adaptation to American society were considered a success story or a model minority community. *Imagining Miami* also entails the myth of homogeneity in the community, defined by political, economic and racial terms.

decades old political war.³³ As an organization that emphasizes the need for political change from within the island, the Cuban exile community in Madrid suffered an unspoken fear of Spanish political influence on the island that would repeat colonial history. For a Spain that in 1992 had celebrated *El Quinto Centenario*—the five-hundred year anniversary of its conquest of the Americas—a Cuba well into the Special Period demonstrated a logical potential for a Spanish neo-colonial re-conquest beyond the economic arena. Historical memory could account for the Martian fashion in which these exiles seem to metaphorically reincarnate the protagonists of the war for independence against Spanish imperialism.³⁴ Establishing the *Fundación Hispano-Cubana* as a space for continuity with a political rhetoric toward Castro's Cuba was thus a historically motivated wartime act aimed at rescuing the island from possible external domination as well as rescuing the exilic project from extinction. It was crucial that Spain, a major investor in the island, recall its own exilic past and not overlook the political potential for a shift to democracy as it stepped in to alleviate the economic crisis.³⁵ Cuban exiles undertook a project similar to that of Spanish exiles in Cuba who, as Spanish historian Consuelo Naranjo Orovio points out, demonstrated various levels of involvement with Spanish politics during Franco's dictatorship that although often overlooked in Spanish historiography, showed the desire of those who immigrated to maintain ties with their nation of origin and its development. Just as the Spanish exile was a key actor in the political, economic, and cultural leanings that Spain developed in Cuba as a result of this

³³ Hudson, Rex A, ed. *Cuba: A Country Study*. (U.S.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 2002) 436.

³⁴ Martian refers to Jose Martí, the national poet who fought for Cuban independence from Spanish and American rule in the late 19th century.

³⁵ According to figures provided by Rex Hudson's *Cuba: A Country Study*, by 1997 Spain provided 12% of imports, making it Cuba's largest supplier of merchandise imports.

exilic participation in Spanish ideology and practice, so Cuban exiles exercise their right to participate in the processes affecting the island during the 1990s.³⁶ The task that the *Fundación* proposed underscores the lack of political clout—counting with only 50,000 votes in Spain this exilic community has to sway Spain’s foreign relations with Cuba in their favor as their Miami counterparts have achieved with the United States government.³⁷ By reasserting the presence of the exile community so interwoven into the Spanish societal fabric, the FHC’s creation prevented what would have been perceived as an act of political treason against them by the host nation’s government led, in 1996, by the *Partido Popular*’s José María Aznar.³⁸

At a Crossroads: Exile Politics and Spanish Policies Toward Cuba

*“The Hispanic Cuban Foundation is becoming a complement to the action of the People’s Party government”.*³⁹

³⁶ Consuelo Naranjo Orovio. *V Centenario del descubrimiento de América: Cuba, otro escenario de lucha, La guerra civil y el exilio republicano español*. (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas. C.S.I.C., 1988) XXI.

³⁷ According to numbers provided by the Population and Housing Census of 2001, 50.765 people born in Cuba were residing in Spain, half of them Spanish citizens.

³⁸ José María Aznar visited Miami in 1995 and met with leaders of various Cuban exile organizations, including Jorge Mas Canosa, the head of the Cuban American National Foundation. It was rumored that he has made this visit seeking campaign funds. In 1996 the White House threatened to impose sanctions on the Spanish hotel chain Sol-Meliá based on its investments in Cuba’s tourist industry, applying the Helms-Burton Law. The latter, in the works since 1995 and eagerly supported by Mas Canosa and the CAF, strengthened the U.S. embargo against Cuba by extending its territorial application to apply to foreign companies trading with Cuba. As Prime Minister, Aznar did not defend the Spanish corporation saying that companies that had business relations with Castro would not have government backing in the face of conflict.

³⁹ Guillermo Gortázar, deputy and member of the Executive Committee of the Spanish People’s Party. He is in charge of Cuban affairs and was the General Secretary of the Hispanic Cuban Foundation at its inception. The quote is from an interview found in Hernando Calvo Ospina and Katlijn Declercq. *Dissidents or Mercenaries: The Cuban Exile Movement*. (La Habana: Casa Editorial Abril, 2000) 101.

Spain's historical linkage with Cuba has been all but normative in the century after its independence, as discussed in the previous chapter. With the notable exception of the Franco era, the economic and political ties between Spain and Cuba have been subject to a boomerang effect where U.S. policy has directly influenced the otherwise bilateral relationship between both states. This was particularly true during the 1990s when the expansion of the U.S. embargo exposed the historically triangular pattern inherent in Spanish-Cuban relations and generated internal contradictions in Spain's domestic policies. In 1996, U.S. Congress approved the Helms-Burton Law which called for imposing sanctions against foreign-owned companies investing in Cuba.⁴⁰ For Spain—Cuba's primary trade partner and the first among European Union member states, exporting four times more Spanish goods than it was buying from Cuba—the Helms-Burton law seemed to set the stage for a litigious relationship between Spain and the United States that would inevitably affect Hispano-Cuban relations.⁴¹ As Joaquin Roy, a renowned scholar of European integration and European-Latin American relations has stated,

A hundred years later, a steady political, social, and economic relationship between Spain and Cuba has again suffered the insertion of the United States. The spirits of William McKinley and Teddy Roosevelt are revived in the persons of Jesse Helms and Dan Burton.⁴²

⁴⁰ The law was a direct response to the Cuban government's orders to shoot down two small aircraft piloted by a Florida-based anti-Castro group, Brothers to the Rescue. By threatening established trade relations with foreign nations such as Spain, the law sought to punish Cuban authorities for their actions. By limiting trade, hope lingered that the measure would lead to political change in Cuba.

⁴¹ According to figures published by Spain's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Commerce, trade figures were in fact not significantly affected by the auspices of the Helms-Burton Law.

⁴² Joaquin Roy. *Cuba, the United States, and the Helms-Burton Doctrine: International Reactions*. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000) 134. Joaquín Roy is a Jean Monnet Professor of European Integration, Director of University of Miami European Union Center and Co-Director of the Miami-Florida European Union Center of Excellence. He has published over 200 academic articles and reviews, and has authored, co-authored or edited 25 books. He has also published over 1,300 columns and essays in newspapers and magazines. Among his awards is the Encomienda of the Order of Merit bestowed by King Juan Carlos of Spain.

Indeed, the White House threatened the Sol-Meliá Company of Spain with sanctions, under the Helms Burton Act (also the Cuban Liberty & Democratic Solidarity Act of 1996). A hotel chain whose owners were almost exclusively responsible for rebuilding Cuba's tourist industry during the 1990s, the actions against Sol-Meliá conflicted with Spain's economic interests in Cuba. The company had flourished under Spain's PSOE administration (1982-1996), which in the international arena had been blamed for the development of Helms-Burton by virtue of its heightened trade and investment links with Havana, traceable to a lesser degree to the Franco years. Instead of defending the company, the newly elected Spanish government led by the Popular Party's Prime Minister José María Aznar, acted indifferently to American actions, sending a clear message of compliance with the statutes set forth by the Helms-Burton Law. If Aznar's actions had left any doubt as to his political leanings in the case of Cuba, the events of the Ibero-American Summit in Chile in November of 1996 clarified them. At a press conference, Aznar resorted to chess lexicon to advise Castro, "If you move your piece" (referencing democracy), "I'll move mine" (referring to economic aid).⁴³ As Roy has pointed out, Aznar's defiant challenge to Castro came at the insistence of the foreign-policy advisers of the Spanish Popular Party, including Foreign Affairs Minister Abel Matutes.⁴⁴ Castro did not respond to the comment but upon his return to the island, he openly referred to Aznar as a *caballerito* or little gentleman when he addressed the Cuban Assembly of Popular Power, affirming that Cuba's dignity could not be played on a chess

⁴³ EFE, "Cumbre Iberoamericana: España se une a petición general para que la democracia alcance a toda América," Nov. 10, 1996. José María Aznar's precise words were, "Si tú mueves pieza, yo moveré la mía".

⁴⁴ Roy, 141.

board.⁴⁵ While the Cuban leader's words confirmed the straining of relations between both countries, Spain's actions did as well. Spain's next move was to present the Council of Ministers of the European Union with a new cooperation-aid plan for the island conditioned on the implementation of political reforms. A poll of E.U. officials and European diplomats with Cuban interests and duties place Spain as number one in the ranking of E.U. Member States having influence in E.U.-Cuba affairs. Spain's approach veered greatly from that of the PSOE for whom "the relationship between Madrid and Havana [was] better understood as a kind of family affair" where sensitive issues were handled bilaterally.⁴⁶ Despite its obvious alignment with the objectives set forth by the Helms-Burton Law that would negatively affect European investment in Cuba, the plan was approved by the European Union in 1996. That same year the Spanish government announced the suspension of a \$16 billion plan to build eight hotels in Cuba to be co-managed by the Cuban agency Gran Caribe and Paradores de España. Other European countries followed suit in the face of uncertainty produced by the U.S. act and Spain's support of it. Cuba's discontent with the political pressure—and its economic repercussions—being officially exerted by the Union vis-à-vis Spain caused a domino effect by which diplomatic relations were irreparably damaged. By the end of 1997 Spain was the only E.U. member state without an ambassador in Havana and it would remain so through 2004—Aznar's term in office. The centennial celebration of 1998 was nonetheless marked by a shift in policy towards Cuba whereby the regulation measure of

⁴⁵ *Caballerito* is the diminutive for *caballero*, a gentleman and its use by Castro can be interpreted in various ways. For one, it can refer to social class where Aznar would be classified as a member of the Spanish elite, a little gentleman. It could also be interpreted as a direct offense where Aznar is catalogued as an aspiring *caballero* who does not fit the bill. The infantilization inherent in the term could also be read as a mockery of Aznar's confrontation with Castro who is popularly known as *el caballo*, the horse. As a politician who lacked experience in foreign affairs, Aznar's actions exhibited a literal intent to "mount" pressure on Castro for political change.

⁴⁶ Roy 141-2.

1996 was overturned in favor of a bill opposing compliance with the tenants of the Helms-Burton Act. The Common Position on Cuba, as this new bill adopted by the European Union was called, proposed that Cuba improve its human rights record and respect the internal dissidence movement as well as the presence of NGOs in return for Spanish and E.U. economic and humanitarian aid cooperation.⁴⁷ The "Common Position" continues to be the de facto policy of Europe toward Cuba and there are some sanctions on Cuba that are indefinitely suspended.⁴⁸ The evident yo-yo effect that characterized Spain's relationship with Cuba during Aznar's first two years in office proved that for the first time in a century, Spain's relations with Cuba suffered significant ramifications as a result of American economic policy. Observers and scholars of the trans-Atlantic relationship between Cuba and Spain like Antonio Elorza of the University of Madrid highlight the instability of Aznar's position on Cuba—supporting the investment ban and later allowing his own minister of industry lead executives on business trips to Havana—as a malady of the exceptional character of their relationship. He has described Aznar's inconsistency in policy, and Spain's by extension, as a matter of the politician attempting to balance being “a delegate of Mas Canosa in Europe” and a spokesman for the regime's “legitimizing sympathizers.”⁴⁹ For others, such as Joaquín Roy, Aznar's unwavering challenges toward Castro coupled with his defiance of the Cuban leader left him with no choice but to shift his approach. With limited diplomatic relations between both countries, Aznar had not managed to propel the Cuban political transition forward. It was no surprise that following the papal visit to Cuba in 1998, a delegation of the Popular

⁴⁷ As Roy points out when changes took place in Spanish approaches to the Cuba case, emissaries of the Popular Party were flown to Miami to meet with CANF members and clarify their intentions.

⁴⁸ The continuation of the suspension of sanctions comes up for review periodically.

⁴⁹ “Razón del gobierno”, *El País*, Feb 5, 1999.

Party members of the European Parliament met with authorities in Havana to discuss the improvement of Spanish aid programs. Because the efforts put forth to achieve democratization were at a standstill, Aznar's moves showed signs of history repeating itself near the centennial celebration for the exile Cuban community. "With no changes in the confrontational attitude", Roy observed, "some may have said as in 1898, that '*más se perdió en Cuba*'".⁵⁰

For Cuban exiles in Spain the 1990s marked a time where no more should be lost in Cuba; it was the decade for political gains in the direction of democracy. With the dismantling of the Soviet Bloc, the subsequent onset of the Special Period signaled trying times for Castro where the hope for change was imminent. Increased European investment in Cuba—spearheaded by Spain—shattered that hope as trade and tourism rescued the Cuban economy from shambles. Hope was revived in 1996 with the Helms-Burton Act and Spanish elections. Cuban exiles in Spain hoped that political pressure in favor of a democratic transition would be at the forefront of Spanish policy toward Cuba at the hands of Prime Minister Aznar and the Popular Party who backed the premises set forth by the U.S. imposed law. It was in response to these changes that the Fundación Hispano-Cubana was created. A few days before Aznar's election, Jorge Mas Canosa, leader of the Cuban American National Foundation and founding member of Madrid's Fundación Hispano-Cubana, was quoted in Spain's *El País* saying, "We don't expect Aznar to break relations with Cuba or to prohibit Spanish investments in Cuba." Mas Canosa was confident Aznar would "introduce a moral element in Spain's policy toward Castro," a policy that is "most consistent with promoting a democratic government in

⁵⁰ Ibid 150.

Cuba.”⁵¹ The FHC was thus constructed as a politically based organization adapted to the specific conditions of Spain and Hispano-Cuban relations whose guiding principles meshed those of its sister organization in Miami—the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF)—and those of the Cuban Democratic Platform of Madrid. As their statement of purpose outlines, the aim of the group was to

convoke the most diverse sectors and leaders of the exile community and of the internal dissident movement in Cuba, together with outstanding Spaniards from the spheres of culture, business and politics, to support these objectives.⁵²

The organization mobilized Cuban exiles in Madrid to action as well as dissidents on the island, under the leadership of influential international figures.⁵³ Composing the FHC’s three member board or *patronato* were: Jorge Mas Canosa, Miami entrepreneur and founder of the CANF; Madrid’s renowned Cuban journalist Carlos Alberto Montaner; and lauded Peruvian writer and politician Mario Vargas Llosa.⁵⁴ The Spanish economist

⁵¹ Antonio Caño. “El líder anticastrista Jorge Mas Canosa acuerda con Telefónica adquirir su filial Sintel”. *El País*. Madrid, March 2, 1996.

⁵² First newsletter edition statement of purpose.

⁵³ Most of the initial members of the FHC were either residing in Miami or had close ties with organizations there such as the Cuban Democratic Coalition (Félix Carcassés) and Democratic and Independent Cuba (Huber Matos, Raúl Rivero).

⁵⁴ Jorge Mas Canosa became the face of the anti-Castro movement in the United States in the 1980s. He has been depicted by Havana as the leader of the Miami exile mafia intent on removing Castro from power by exerting political and economic clout over U.S. policymakers. When the paramilitary Cuban exile Posada Carilles—who claimed responsibility for the bombings at hotels and nightclubs in Cuba in 1997 and was accused of the bombing of Cuban Flight 455—Jorge Mas Canosa was accused by the Cuban government of funding these and other anti-Cuban terrorist activities. Alberto Montaner is one of the most widely-read columnists in the Spanish language, writing both for American and Spanish publications. He has been on the Miami Herald’s Editorial Board since 2004. His writing is defined by its defense of democracy, human rights, and market economics. A staunch supporter of U.S. policies toward Latin America and has encouraged Latin America to adopt the values and institutions that he believes underlie the success of democratic nations. Montaner has lived in Madrid since 1970 when he established a publishing house. and joined the Cuban Liberal Union of Madrid upon Franco’s death. He has written several books on Cuba and other Latin American countries, has hosted political commentary shows for Spanish television, has lectured across Latin America and has received numerous prizes for his work as a journalist. Mario Vargas Llosa one of Latin America’s most significant novelists and essayists, as well as one of the leading authors of his generation and the Boom of the 1960s. Over the course of his life, he has gradually moved from the political left towards the right. While he initially supported the Castro’s revolutionary government, he later

and financial advisor to Prime Minister Adolfo Suárez, Alberto Recarte, was appointed president of the foundation and Guillermo Gortázar, a deputy and member of the Executive Committee of the Spanish Popular Party, in charge of Cuban Affairs, was the FHC's General Secretary. In an interview, Gortázar confirmed the expectations placed on Aznar's government by Cuban exiles in the creation of this organization which he himself sent in motion after participating in CANF's annual congress in 1996. He said, "The Hispanic Cuban Foundation is becoming a complement to the action of the Popular Party government. The dictator should be given as little oxygen as possible, so he'll waste away alone."⁵⁵

For a country whose intellectuals and youth have historically been fascinated with the Cuban Revolution, a country where Franco held Castro in high esteem despite their opposing political ideologies, and a country that gave Cuba one of the largest amounts of development aid of any state in the Americas during the 1990s, the promise of suffocating Castro was not widely accepted in Spain. Gortazar's words equated both the Popular Party and the FHC with right wing extremist action and the day the Fundación was inaugurated proved the continued mayhem that the topic of Spanish policy toward Cuban politics stirred in Madrid. Hernando Calvo Ospina recounts the events of that initial "troubled" meeting which took place on November 14, 1996. He says,

became disenchanted with its direction. He was among a score of prominent European and Latin American writers who authored an open letter of protest to Fidel Castro published in the French paper *Le Monde* on April 9, 1971. The letter protested the imprisonment of Cuban poet Heberto Padilla who had been arrested without specified cause. A worldwide controversy was sparked when Padilla was placed under house arrest for what was considered subversive writing because of the verses in his award-winning 1968 anthology *Fuera del Juego (Out Of The Game)* that expressed dissatisfaction with the Castro regime. The evident suppression of criticism among the Revolution's intellectuals was a main concern for the authors of the letter who nonetheless expressed solidarity with the principles of the Revolution.

⁵⁵ Guillermo Gortázar, deputy. The quote is from an interview found in *Dissidents or Mercenaries: The Cuban Exile Movement*. As quoted in an interview in Hernando Calvo and Katlijn Declercq. 101.

300 members of nongovernmental and solidarity organizations with Cuba demonstrated at the entrance and met the very select guests with a hail of eggs and tomatoes. The demonstrators shouted at the members of the Spanish Government and Spaniards who were going to the meeting, calling them accomplices of terrorists and collaborators with the Mafia, and at the Cuban-U.S. citizens and Cuban-Spaniards, calling them fascists, Mafia members and murderers.⁵⁶

The general consensus among these and other Spaniards who do not support the organization has been that because American policies toward Cuba had proven ineffective nearly forty years into the embargo, Cuban exiles in Miami had to turn to Madrid for immediate results. The FHC was not seen as an organization legitimately created by Cuban exiles in Spain seeking to work toward change in Cuba but rather as a tool of the extreme right wing Cuban exile community in Miami intent on exerting pressure on Spain to promote Cuba's democratization and gradual transition to capitalism as a condition of continued economic relations between island and peninsula. Ultimately, Spain would relay this exilic urgency to the European Union whose policy on Cuba goes through Madrid. José Ignacio Salafranca, Spanish deputy to the European Union was often singled out for the conflict of interest that his participation in the FHC exemplifies. Critics of the foundation have signaled the historical irony inherent in Spain's Popular Party allying itself with the United States to help it recover control of Cuba a century after both imperial powers went to war for possession of the island. In 1997 the opposition to the FHC reached the Spanish Congress in the form of a proposal drafted by the United Left Party (*Izquierda Unida*) calling for the outlawing of the foundation and expulsion from Spain of members considered to be terrorists. The petition relied on accusations of exilic involvement in attacks on Havana's tourist sector in 1997 headed by Luis Posada Carriles, whereby bombs were placed in several Spanish hotels. It also relied

⁵⁶ Calvo Ospina 101.

on evidence that one of the organization's members, José Antonio Llama, had been linked to a plan to assassinate Castro at the Ibero-American Summit held that year in Venezuela. Although their plea was publicly recognized by the Minister of Foreign Relations, Abel Matutes, no action was taken on the matter. The result was not a surprise to most opponents who, recalling Matutes's and Aznar's diplomatic discourtesy in receiving Jorge Mas Canosa before receiving an official representative of the Cuban government, realized the new direction that Spain's relation with Cuba was taking. Aznar's subsequent visits to Miami instead of Cuba in 1998 reinforced the reality of that direction.

While the trans-Atlantic boomerang effect of Miami-Havana-Madrid can neither be denied nor overlooked in a discussion about the establishment of the Fundación Hispano Cubana, members of the latter insist on the local character of the organization and its proposed fight for Cuban democracy from the Hispano-exilic point of view. The FHC maintains it was organized, launched, and kept in motion for over a decade in Madrid by Cuban exiles residing in Spain's capital city and Spaniards sharing their agenda for a transition to democracy in Cuba. It came into existence as a result of a line of convergence about opposition to Castro was born among the exile community in Spain that until then neither dissidents in Havana nor exiles in Miami had expressed. Mainly, it distinguished itself from the binary in its noted attempt to establish ideological balance in the FHC's *patronato* by including a controversial leftist, Elizardo Sánchez, and having others of his political leanings, more notably Oswaldo Payá and Gustavo Arcos, among

its members.⁵⁷ In publicly seeking to disprove rumors of being merely an extremist right wing organization, General Secretary Gortázar has been quoted as saying:

The Fundación Hispano Cubana has a project of freedom and democracy, where the members of the right can sit down at the same table with the members of the left. These individuals build up respect for the FHC, because we don't have a defined party affiliation. In Spain, the FHC is viewed as anti-Castro, when, in fact, it only wants Cuba's freedom... the FHC is open to anybody who wants to fight for freedom and democracy in Cuba.⁵⁸

Despite its initial strength, the Fundación Hispano Cubana faced turbulent times a year after its creation once both Carlos Alberto Montaner and Jorge Mas Canosa resigned from the organization's leadership. The marked differences between their approaches to Cuban politics, liberal and right wing respectively, hinted at endangering the foundation's future stability. Although these resignations significantly diluted the political tone of the

⁵⁷ Elizardo Sanchez is a Cuban human rights campaigner and founder of the Cuban Human Rights and National Reconciliation Commission, a group supporting change in Cuba. Sánchez and his co-defendants are charged with spreading false rumors, apparently on the basis of interviews they gave to foreign journalists in July, after the trial and execution of General Arnaldo Ochoa. As founder of the Cuban Committee for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN in Spanish), Sanchez has spent more than one-sixth of his life in prison for chronicling Fidel Castro's human-rights abuses. Through his anti-government activities, the former professor of Marxist philosophy has become perhaps Cuba's best-known dissident. Some call him Cuba's "official" dissident because he is so often quoted by international media-- and a few Miami hardliners even accuse Sanchez of being a paid agent of Castro because he opposes the U.S. embargo and the 1996 Helms-Burton Act. Oswaldo Payá is a political activist in Cuba and is considered that country's most prominent political dissident. A founding member of the Christian Liberation Movement in 1988. Created by secular Catholics it is today a non-denominational political organization seeking to further the civic and human rights of Cubans. In 1992 he announced his intention to run for Cuba's National Assembly of Popular Power and shortly thereafter detained by police at his home. In 1998 he founded the Varela Project which aims to exercise the constitutional right to appeal to the government for legislative changes via a national referendum. Since then has collected over 20,000 signatures from Cubans on the island supporting the change but none of his requests have been recognized. Gustavo Arcos was a fellow Cuban revolutionary alongside Fidel Castro who later became an imprisoned dissident of the government. He grew disillusioned with Cuba's alliance with the Soviet Union and upon beginning to express his dissent he was imprisoned for being a counterrevolutionary. He was released after a long hunger strike in 1969, but his request to leave the country was refused. In the 1980s he became the executive secretary of the national Cuban Committee for Human Rights. Gustavo decided not to leave Cuba and spent the rest of his life trying to improve human rights in the island and promoting a peaceful transition to democracy.

⁵⁸ Calvo Ospina 110-1.

FHC, it has not diminished the organization's foresight and its members continue to engage in an expansive agenda of community outreach services through which Cuban exiles actively participate in cultural exchange, educational forums, raising awareness about human rights issues in Cuba, and humanitarian aid efforts for Cuban exiles in Spain and Cubans on the island. The changes in leadership have also not hindered the FHC's ability to exert influence over Spanish-Cuban relations, carving a political Cuban space on Madrid's (policy) landscape.

Exiles United

“Unidos por la libertad”⁵⁹

For members of the Fundación Hispano Cubana, Wednesday evenings in Madrid mark a weekly commitment to the tertulias held at building number 8 on Orfila Street. Known as *Miércoles de Fundación* (Fundación Wednesdays), it is between the hours of six and seven that the members—mostly older, male, white Cuban exiles and Spaniards who support the exilic vision of a Cuban transition to democracy—begin to trickle into the first floor gathering space. It is a grand yet unpretentious space with a couple of administrative offices and an anteroom of classic décor adjacent to the main meeting area where a humble but growing collection of Cuban literature is found. Adorning the main room are a Spanish flag and a Cuban flag on either side of an oversized organization logo—an H in the red hue of the Spanish flag superimposed on a blue C, blue being one of the three colors of Cuba's flag. The decorative simplicity of this space stands in stark contrast to the spectacular tourist spaces discussed earlier in the chapter and speaks of the

⁵⁹ FHC's motto, as established in 1996. It translates to “United for or by freedom”.

formality inherent in the Spanish solidarity and union with the exilic Cuban community's social project in Madrid. On a given Wednesday the agenda can be limitless but limited to issues related to Cuba—human rights for Cuban citizens, the state of Cuba's foreign relations, reports on the Cuban economy, updates on exilic activities in Spain, and the role that exilic Cubans are to play in forging Cuba's democratic future. Whether these topics are addressed in response to book presentations, film screenings, art exhibits, talks given by guest speakers from the Madrilian exile community, or simply a thread of discussion proposed by someone in attendance, it is through open discussion in a private space that members of the FHC exchange ideas and opinions. The dialogues that these weekly meetings generate serve as an outlet for a community that otherwise may not partake in discussions about Cuban politics outside of this space as there is a perceived vilification—outlined in the foundation's statement of purpose as an ill to be remedied—of the Cuban exile as one that partakes in a larger, damaging societal project led by a Miami mafia of manipulative politicians and community leaders who exert their influence in the United States and now Spain to impede the establishment of diplomatic relations with Cuba.⁶⁰ Intent on making their own mark on the exilic project for democracy, Cubans in Spain turn to these reunions as their foundational stepping stone in exilic community building in Madrid. It is in the comfort of Orfila number 8 that self-proclaimed exiles can openly engage in conversation: about the state of Cuban affairs and the ways in which they, as Cubans fully integrated into Spanish society, propose to influence the course of Spanish relations with Cuba in the 1990s when small numbers and the lack of economic and political clout work against them.

⁶⁰ In the first newsletter, Jorge Mas Canosa addresses this issue. See "Inauguración". *Revista Fundación Hispano-Cubana* (1996).



*Figure 2.20 FHC Tertulia, Spring 2008 with members/
writers (l to r) Luis García, Luis Orlando Fondevila and Nicolás Águila*

Thus, the tertulia is the first step in establishing dialogue—amongst Cuban exiles in Madrid, between the exiles and the Spanish government, between Cuban exiles in Miami and other geographic locations, and lastly between exiles and the internal dissidence on the island. I use the term dialogue specifically to describe these exchanges between Cuban exiles and other groups because of the historical importance of this concept for the exilic lexicon dating back to the years following Castro’s Revolution. The experience of the Cuban exilic generations of the 1960s and 1970s was marked by a definitive break with the Revolution that adamantly discarded the possibility of relations between those who left Cuba and the Cuban government. Born of that break was a code of silence manifested by an unwavering resistance to the act of conversation, of a dialogue between exiles and Cuban authorities. It was nearly twenty years after Castro’s rise to power that the exile community, with its base in Miami, began to demonstrate polarized visions of the relations with Cuba as matters of family reunification, travel to the island, and concerns about political prisoners came to the forefront for Cubans abroad

warranting an attempt at conversation.⁶¹ It was achieved mainly through the efforts of Cuban youth in Miami and in Puerto Rico who through activism and the creation of organizations such as the Antonio Maceo Brigade ultimately facilitated the overdue dialogue. The actions of Madrid's Cuban exile community during the time are nearly nonexistent in history and sociology books with little more than a mention of the exilic diaspora's presence in Spain. Research done among older generations of Cubans exiles in Madrid points at a potent sentiment of solidarity with the Cuban cause for democracy and the need for action that nonetheless exhibited a minimal pattern of activism (when compared to that of Cuban Miami) mainly due to the historical moment lived under Franco's Spain.⁶² Although the rise to action through the Fundación Hispano Cubana may seem a belated (re)action to a decades long struggle for Cuban transition to democracy, for Cubans of the Madrid diaspora, the 1990s was signaled their historical moment—to borrow the term from anthropologist Ruth Behar—to build bridges to Cuba. Those bridges were built, at the cusp of the centennial celebration, on the foundation of dialogue between the Madrilian exile and both the Spanish government and Cuban

⁶¹ The 1970s thus witnessed the pluralization of exilic politics toward Cuba, simultaneously shattering the myth of a monolithic Cuban exile community. The tendency toward dialogue was controversial among Cuban circles and led to a number of violent acts that portrayed Cuban exiles as political fanatics. America's Watch—a division of an international human rights monitoring organization, issued a report in 1992 entitled "Dangerous Dialogue: Attacks on Freedom of Expression in Miami's Exile Community". The report profiled various exile organizations operating in Miami, zoning in on their stances toward that Cuban community's dialogue with Fidel Castro's government. It showed that discourses toward island politics since the 1970's were uniform in favor of silence between Miami and Havana, reinforced by the images of incidents of terrorism and intimidation by exile groups toward pro-dialogue supporters. The most obvious of which was the bombing of Miami's Cuban art museum in the 1980s for exhibiting works by painters living on the island.

⁶² Scholars, politicians and economists among other observers of Cuban political history have pointed out that given the internal politics of the United States, the Cuban community received special concessions as part of their calculating manipulation to serve for American interests. It was easy for the Miami exile enclave to develop a strong network of political and economic action against Cuba that continues to influence U.S. policymakers. Some like Calvino Campo have suggested that the term mercenaries would be a more suitable to describe Cubans in the United States instead of exiles.

dissidents. Dialogue was used in the 1997 *Carta abierta de intelectuales cubanos residentes en España* authored by members of the Fundación Hispano Cubana as the defining element of their organization's objectives, attesting to its significance for political activism. The letter read,

Los abajo firmantes manifiestan de esta forma su voluntad dialogante con aquellas posiciones que establecen frentes comunes a favor de la cultura democrática, de nuestra identidad, de los espacios culturales perdidos y de nuestra verdadera soberanía nacional, sin absorción ni concesiones que perjudiquen la consolidación de nuestro propio destino nacional; conceptos que necesitan más de una precisión histórica, precisamente ahora cuando se cumple en breve el Primer centenario de la Guerra Hispano-Cubana-Norteamericana, acaecida en 1898.⁶³

Here, dialogue in its textbook sense—a discussion between representatives of parties to a conflict that is aimed at resolution—is not appropriate for there is only one side of the political resolve on the table for discussion: working toward the democratization of Cuba.⁶⁴ Nonetheless, in opening the lines of communication with the Popular Party and the internal dissidence, a trans-national conversation is established aimed at resolving the pressing issue that breaks the silence between the exile fighting from without the island and the *insiles* (inside exiles)—political prisoners, dissidents, and independent journalists—who fight from within Cuba. In silence there is nostalgia and time is frozen in history as extensive studies on Miami have shown. Establishing a dialogue between those who strive for freedom on either side of the Atlantic—the proverbial *los de aquí y*

⁶³ The letter was published in the FHC's first newsletter and was signed by ten of its members, including Madrid-based Cuban journalists Carlos Alberto Montaner and Lissette Bustamante. Cuban authors Pío Serrano and Alberto Lauro, and Cuban leftist intellectual Iván de la Nuez signed the letter as well. The only woman to lend her signature to the letter was poet, leader of the anti-Castro grupo *Criterio Alternativo* and prisoner of conscience now residing in Puerto Rico, María Elena Cruz Varela.

⁶⁴ In Cuban circles, *el diálogo* refers specifically to “the dialogue”—the bilateral agreement between the United States and Cuba to initiate talks about political changes on the island. While these talks are highly anticipated and supported by various sectors of the Cuban community, for hardliners the exercise in conversation is looked upon with disdain because they believe the matter of Cuba to be one of implementing change, not discussing it with Cuban leaders whom they believe to be irrevocably set in the way of socialism.

los de allá—is more than anything symbolic of the Cuban need to “matar el gorrión” or do away with melancholy. By openly speaking about the Cuban reality of the 1990s with those who were living it instead of imagining it from afar the war against dictatorship ceased to be a mirage, bringing the exile community into the Cuban present; the Madrilian exile has, through these exchanges, inched forward in historic time, past 1959.

The most palpable experience of that dialogue with the Cuban dissident movement is through the participation of current Cuban political prisoners in the FHC’s weekly tertulias. Coming face to face with the internal counterparts in the political struggle personalizes exilic action and further extends the possibility to dialogue about the workings toward a common goal. It thus becomes obvious that the Fundación’s members are not the sole *mambises* fighting a decades old political war, instead reaching out to the internal dissidence in accomplishing the task set forth in their motto, *Unidos por la libertad*. Witnessing such exchanges reveals that while a common objective is at hand, the perceptions of effective strategies for reaching it are heterogeneous in nature. A prominent example is the presence of Héctor Palacios at the Wednesday tertulia in the spring of 2008. Palacios had been granted a medical visa to Spain after human rights watches advocated on his behalf to receive medical treatment for a severe heart condition he developed while serving a 25 year sentence in Cuba. Palacios was imprisoned for advocating human rights reforms and for owning a collection of books banned by the Cuban government.⁶⁵ His presence at the FHC, undoubtedly politically charged, stirred a

⁶⁵ Héctor Palacios Ruiz has been a dissident since 1980 and was an independent librarian who circulated books considered by the Cuban government as subversive and counterrevolutionary. In March 2003, 75 human rights advocates, independent journalists and librarians were arrested, tried, and sentenced to up to 28 years in prison in what is considered the most severe crackdown the island has seen in recent history. Many of the imprisoned dissidents were organizers of the Varela Project, a constitutionally-based civic initiative that collected signatures on a petition calling for a referendum on democratic reforms and respect for basic freedoms. Palacios made human rights watch headlines due to his failing health along with Dr.

range of emotions amongst the organizations' members. While some applauded his selfless commitment to civil rights in Cuba, others questioned the efficacy of his imprisonment urging him to claim political exile in Spain.⁶⁶ Regardless of the opinions that circulated at that night's meeting, the fact that the dissident voice was heard in the Fundación's space differentiated the organization's exilic experience from that of Miami as well as their relationship with Cuba and the specific direction their mission took as a Spain-based organization. Unlike their Miami counterparts, Madrid's Cuban exiles can engage in this person to person dialogue with dissidents working toward democracy from within the island because the diplomatic relations between Spain and Cuba allow for such exchanges in the same geographic place. The FHC literally brings a transnational, trans-Atlantic struggle into one politically constructed Cuban space in Madrid. In this sense, the Cuban exiles in Madrid are more in touch with Cuban reality as it develops from within rather than how it is mythically constructed from without.

The reach of this dialogue launched by the FHC in Spain has, beyond the locale on Madrid's Orfila Street, surpassed geopolitical boundaries in the form of the journal *Revista Hispano Cubana*. What began as a brief but thorough newsletter in 1997—featuring news about Cuba, articles ranging the gamut from popular culture to op-ed pieces on Spanish policy toward Cuba, essays, poems and short stories, book reviews, bulletins and listings of FHC's community activities—evolved into a journal that has been published biyearly since 1998. It is known to circulate clandestinely in Havana

Oscar Elias Biscet who in 2007 was awarded the United States Presidential Medal of Freedom for his commitment to human rights advocacy in Cuba.

⁶⁶ The night of May 2, 2008 at the weekly FHC meeting there were rumors that Palacios had different versions of his state of suffering and physical conditions in Cuba's jails. He had been the key speaker in a similar event in Miami for the Cuban American National Foundation a couple of weeks earlier and it was said that he exaggerated the details of his experience for his Miami audience. Some even thought him a spy of the Cuban government, finding his unsupervised visit to Miami suspicious.

among dissidents and intellectuals who want to be kept abreast of political, economic, and cultural developments concerning Cuba and its diaspora as well as the reactions to those events as the journal covers the breadth of the Cuban experience in Spain extensively. The FHC has its own publisher, housed at the Orfila site and the journal's editorial board—among who is Castro's daughter Alina Fernández—accepts contributions from an array of sources who sympathize with the cause for Cuban democracy. Central to the mission of this organization is providing a forum for Cuban and international intellectual exchange and the written word allows for this bridge to Cuba to be extended on a grander scale. Its creation followed suit with the literary space carved out in 1996 by Cuban exiles Jesús Díaz and Rafael Rojas in the journal *Encuentro con la cultura cubana*. Although their vision for the publication is marked by a distanced position from the bipolar left-right dynamic, it nonetheless aimed to promote non-partisan *encuentros*—encounters or dialogues—with Cuban culture and the Cuban diasporic experience. Both journals have joined the ranks of Cuban publications in Madrid, among the oldest of which are those belonging to the Editorial Betania collections, founded by Cuban poet Felipe Lázaro in the 1980s.⁶⁷ With the reach of the Internet, the ultimate technological tool for bridging gaps, both journals are made more readily accessible to a

⁶⁷ Despite the exilic condition that inspired an intellectual, literary unification project among Cuban exiles and insiles, *Encuentro* does not identify with a specific line of politics toward Cuba, as the FHC's journal unequivocally does. Rather, it emphasizes the unity of Cuban culture with foresight into the future not hindsight into the irreparable past and the insistence on irreconcilable political views which marks the exile community. It is a moderate voice that distances itself from the traditional Miami rhetoric and Madrid allowed for a more nuanced position toward Cuba. The proof of that greater space is in Felipe Gonzalez's engaged politics with Cuba in contrast to the U.S. until 1996. *Encuentro* has been contested on the island as a non-political publication by *La Jiribilla* Young Communists and the Cuban Book Institute. Felipe Lázaro's editorial house has published a great number of works—and fiction non-fiction alike—written by members of the FHC. His editorial publishes ten different collections and after 20 years in business Betania has published over 400 books by Spanish speaking authors. Lázaro estimates of the 100 books by Cuban authors, 90% have been from Cuban exiles and 10% from Cubans on the island. Other Cuban editorial houses in Madrid include *Universal*, *Verbum*, *Pliegos*, and *Colibrí*.

larger readership.⁶⁸ In this way, literature of the Cuban exile transcends the geopolitical confines of Madrid, the limitations of the written page, and the walls of the first floor of Orfila Street number 8 as exilic spaces, to carve a Cuban exilic niche in cyber-space. Whether it is at the click of a mouse, the turning of a journal page, the creation of one, or a conversation at the Wednesday night tertulia, what the gatherings at the second floor of the Orfila Street structure offers Cuban exiles in Madrid and their supporters is an identifiable space, political in its scope and purpose, from which to build an exilic front for democratic change.

As the arguments presented here demonstrate, Madrid stands as a thirdspace of the Cuban diaspora that while undeniably linked to the United States and Cuba is nonetheless an individual entity with objectives and internal workings specific to the host nation. In this sense, Madrid contests the prevalence of the Miami-Havana binary as the only references to be considered when discussing the Cuban exile community abroad. The gathering place at Orfila Street number 8, experienced as a political space by its members, latent with a sense of urgency and the zealotry of an immediate nationalist project to be accomplished, is neither mapped nor mapable in Madrid's cityscape. While it is a recognizable exilic Cubanscape—an observable Cuban space that is also a Cuban (e)scape for exiles—it is a private Spanish place to which, unguided, a walk in the city would not lead.

⁶⁸ The web sites for the journals are: www.revistahc.org (FHC) and www.cubaencuentro.com/revista (*Encuentro*).

The Cuban Spatial Ajiaco: Blending Gathering and Artistic Spaces *a lo cubano*
At Home in Madrid: Pilar and *El Bar Yemayá*

*Allí, donde te conocí,
 quiero volver a verte otra vez...*⁶⁹



Figure 2.21 Calle Calatrava, La Latina Neighborhood (Pictured on the left: Carnicería—Halal Butcher Shop; Peluquería Estética Miguel A.—Spanish hair salon; Sha—Asian variety store. Pictured on the right Caribbean Bar/Disco—La Ceniza II. Not pictured, just past this bar is Bar Yemayá)

La Latina, a trendy bohemian neighborhood south of Madrid’s city center, is home to a Cuban space that is marked on the map of a younger generation of Cubans residing in Spain’s capital—*El Bar Yemayá*. Named after the Afro-Cuban deity considered the Mother of the Sea, the Spanish bar—one of countless amongst Madrid’s social scene—has been a point of cultural encounter for Madrid’s Cuban community since the late 1990s when it first opened its doors in the Chueca sector of the city.⁷⁰ Its owner and promoter, Pilar Zumel, has come to embody the Cuban deity’s spirit, as a motherly figure who has bridged a trans-Atlantic divide between Cubans living in Madrid and those arriving there. Considered a Spanish Yemayá by some and a *madrina* or

⁶⁹ “There, where I first met you, I’d like to meet with you again” is the motto of El bar Yemayá.

⁷⁰ In the Afro-Cuban religion of Santería, Yemayá is the goddess of the waters. She is also known as La Virgen de Regla, Our Lady of Regla, in the Catholic lexicon. As the Mother of the Seas, she is venerated and called upon for protection by Cubans who must literally and metaphorically cross the sea when they immigrate to other countries.

godmother by others, the religious parallelism abounds in defining her relationship with Cubans in Madrid who feel that far from being merely a local business owner Pilar is the figurative mother for Cubans in the Motherland (*madre patria*).⁷¹ She is, as her given name implies, a pillar for that community and a familial interlocutor for Cubans who settled in Madrid, especially during the 1990s. So deep run her ties with Cuba and Cuban culture that despite her Madrilian ancestry she is popularly known as Pili de Mantilla, an honorary native of Havana's old quarter neighborhood. In the same way that Cubans imagine her as a part of Cuba and place her within their homeland—*una habanera madrileña*—she imagines Cubans as a part of Spain and places them within Madrid's urban landscape.⁷² For a woman whose connection to the island dates back to childhood exchanges with Cuban pen pals whom she found through advertisements in Spanish newspapers, Pilar has come a long way from writing letters in her adolescence to writing a new chapter of Hispano-Cuban relations in Madrid through a modest but valued Spanish place turned Cuban space—*El Bar Yemayá*.⁷³

⁷¹ For those who are seeking initiation into the Santería religion, an ordained spiritual guide is in charge of leading the candidate in the process and this person is referred to as a godparent (madrina or padrino).

⁷² *Habanera madrileña* translates to a woman from Havana who has become a part of Madrid. Although it is not Pilar's actual situation, it does reinforce the idea that she is part of the Cuban family—she comes from the same homeland that Cubans do.

⁷³ Pilar first came into contact with Cubans via pen pals in her youth when the Spanish newspaper *El pueblo* published announcements for children in Cuba and other countries seeking to make friends abroad through letter exchanges. She is candid about being attracted to Cuba since then.



Figure 2.22 Bar Yemayá, La Latina

Unlike the commercialized Cuban spaces such as *La Negra Tomasa* and the exilic space of the Fundación Hispano Cubana already discussed, *El bar Yemayá* neither relies on ethnic tourism nor on a political agenda to draw a crowd, be it Cuban or not. Pilar, neither a calculating businesswoman cashing in on the Cuban fad nor someone with a pressing political project at a key moment in Hispano-Cuban diplomatic and economic relations, acknowledges the absence of a welcoming gathering place that could bring Cubans together regardless of an array of factors that cause community factions including race or reasons for leaving the island. Recalling the surge of Cuban themed locales populating the Madrid landscape in the 1990s, she highlights the distinguishing trait of *Yemayá*. She says,

En Madrid siempre ha habido lugares y locales cubanos, pero muy dedicados al turismo. Entonces, para todos los cubanos, que estaban en Madrid el *Yemayá* fue 'la casa'. Cuando viene un extraño hay que llevarle a tu casa, y cuando llegaba alguien de Cuba u otro país, los cubanos los llevaban al *Yemayá*, como si lo

invitaran a su propia casa... El *Yemayá* siempre estuvo por encima de la política... La política se guardaba para otros espacios.⁷⁴

Pilar's bar was thus marked by difference at a time when all things or all places Cuban in Madrid fit one of two homogenous patterns: commercialization or political activism. The deviation from those patterns that this place embodies coupled with the parallels made between *Yemayá* and home are suggestive in light of theorizations about the politics of home. It has already been argued in chapter 1 that Cuban migration to Spain in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is representative of a homecoming because of familial ties between the island and the peninsula, based on a broader history of socio-economic relations dating to the colonial era. Thus, mapping home in this localized Madrilian place comes to reflect a microcosm of those trans-Atlantic crossings to Spain allowing the trope for a Cuban homecoming to a motherland where a receptive mother welcomes her children. In fact, the place that Pilar describes above is actually a familial space that not only conjures but embodies the adage *Welcome Home*. Rosemary Marangoly George argues that home is a way of establishing difference given that home as well as home-countries are exclusive and act as ideological determinants of the subject. Far from being a neutral place, George suggests home is a political act that establishes hegemonic power.⁷⁵ Understood within this framework, *Yemayá* is indeed a home space that embodies difference through inclusivity. There are no differentiations racial, political or otherwise when it comes to community gathering among Cubans at *Yemayá*. In terms of power relations, hegemony is left to the community that by freely

⁷⁴ As quoted in an interview by Laura Redruello. "Los cubanos me lo han dado todo". in *Cubanecuentro Digital*. February 7, 2007. <http://www.cubaencuentro.com/es/entrevistas/articulos/los-cubanos-me-lo-han-dado-todo-30761>.

⁷⁵ Rosemary Marangoly George. *The Politics of Home*. (Berkeley: University of California Press: 1999) 2-6.

interacting in this place constructs a social space that is imagined by Cubans and lived by them. Its construction is natural and its meaning is not imposed from without but rather created from within. Here home is disassociated from the private, more accurately being akin to the intimate or familial where community building is forged in stark contrast to other locales in Madrid's Cuban geography that given their exclusive nature are places that reinforce the binarism between home and not home. In the 1990s, *Yemayá* offered a home away from home for those who had, under various circumstances and for diverse reasons, left their homeland and as exiles, immigrants or passersby seek to reconnect with other Cubans and with Cuban culture.

The feeling of home that characterizes this space—and photographs of that Cuban family that has visited *Yemayá* abound as evidence of this—has its roots precisely in Pilar's place of dwelling; it was in her home that she began to bring Cubans together in Spain's capital city during the Franco era. A faithful follower of the Nueva Trova movement of the 1970s, she began to frequent a music venue in Madrid called *El Mesón del comunista* where Silvio Rodríguez and Pablo Milanés, artists of the musical genre, performed once they gained popularity in Spain. In these circles she came into contact with Cubans—writers, musicians and artists among them—with whom she shared her home. Her home quickly became a place to be visited as a right of passage for Cubans who lived in Madrid and those who were simply visiting Spain's capital city. A woman who lived through the Spanish Civil War, Pilar vividly recalled the memory and pain of national divide. She did not wish upon Cubans living their own history of political divide after Castro's Revolution, to sever ties of unity. She felt that Cubans in Madrid not only needed to be but deserved to be united through their culture and she inadvertently

provided them with the space for the exchanges to occur. Here, this analysis of home and sentiments that *Yemayá* invokes can be divorced from physical place to be read within a broader context of what Raymond Williams has called “structures of feeling”—those multiple realities, discourses and representations that intersect in the period of a given *Zeitgeist*. If the 1970s marked the latent presence of a Francoist era where the silencing of otherness was a societal norm keeping with the nationalist sentiment of homogeneity, Pilar’s individual embrace of the foreign, here Cuban music and culture, attests to the existence of these divergent structures of feelings. Whether it can be credited to Rodríguez’s and Milanés’s *canción protesta* whose message rang true for a generation hoarding counter-sentiments to the Fascist regime of the era or to a memory of pen pals on the island decades earlier, Pilar’s feelings toward Cubans and the feeling of home that she furnished them reinforces the familial ties that have united Cuba and Spain in such a way that the antithetical political ideologies of the time did not prohibit homing.⁷⁶ As these Hispano-Cuban exchanges continued to occur, Pilar continued to inscribe that familial history (versus History) into space—first her home and two decades later *Yemayá*. The historical moment during which the gatherings at Pilar’s home were extended to a public place, a bar, also highlights another instance of Williams’s structures of feeling at work. A 1990s Madrid, capital city of a country on the verge of shifting from a nation of émigrés to a nation of immigrants, was faced with the arrival of otherness on its shores. While the nationalist discourse seemed to welcome Cubans among other Latin American, Eastern European, and African immigrants, quotidian reality documented by

⁷⁶ *Canción protesta* is the musical genre born in Cuba during the 1970s whose message was that of social protest against injustices at home and abroad.

sociologists, anthropologists, and the media suggested unpreparedness for this arrival.⁷⁷ While many did not feel like they were at home in Madrid, Cubans were the exceptional minority in the presence of Pilar which in exempting them from the feeling of dislocation, proved the multilayered possibilities of structures of feelings within in place in one given time.



Figure 2.23 Cuban Wall of Fame, Bar Yemayá (Amongst those pictured, i.e. who have visited the bar and autographed their photographs, are Miami exile singer Olga Guillot, Cuban American journalist Cristina Saralegui, *Fresa y chocolate* (1994) Cuban actor Vladimir Cruz and Madrid-based Habana Blues protagonist Roberto San Martín)



Figure 2.24 Cuban Wall of Fame II (Pictured: Cuban actor Jorge Perugorria, Buena Vista Social Club musician Eliades Ochoa, Cuban pianist Bebo Valdés, *Un rey en la Habana* actress María Isabel Díaz, and Cuban singing icon Pablo Milanés)

In 1999, *Yemayá* (the place) became an extension of a Spanish home and the activities at the bar became an extension of those that took place at Pilar's Madrid apartment on Sunday afternoons. What for "*la Mamá Inés de Madrid, mezcla de chulapa y de lucumí*" was nothing more than a business venture named after a goddess that she had come to revere as a result of years of close ties with Cubans, turned into a Cuban

⁷⁷ See Consuelo Orovio in Mary Nash. *Inmigrantes en nuestro espejo: Inmigración y discurso periodístico en la prensa española*. (Barcelona: Editorial Icaria, 1995).

space in its own right.⁷⁸ It was not her intention to invest in a locale that would revolve around Cuban culture but the multitude of Cuban friends and acquaintances who had been meeting informally at her home over decades made their presence at the bar a fixture. As Pilar tells it,

[Los cubanos] se sentían a gusto y empezaron a acogerlo como un espacio propio. No tuve que ofrecérselos, ellos lo tomaron. Nunca fue nada programado. Se hizo solo, de allí su belleza... La gente pasaban allí las tardes; hacían sus descargas, componían, escribían, pintaban... músicos, pintores, escritores, actores, directores...⁷⁹

The spontaneous evolution of this Spanish place into a Cuban space is telling insofar as it strengthens the sense of family Pilar has fostered amongst Cubans in Madrid. The level of comfort or *confianza* that led to *Yemayá's* transformation speaks of the act of homing—*estar en casa, entre familia*.⁸⁰ Pilar is thus cast as the imagined maternal figure that Cubans hope to find once they arrive in the Motherland (*madre patria*). *Yemayá's* unscripted birth as a Cuban space is consistent with geographer Yi-Fu Tuan's observations about space and place as polar opposites to be understood through the experiences that occur within them. In his book *Space and Place*, Tuan suggests that while place is synonymous with pause—a location to stop and rest—space is about freedom, an open arena of action and movement.⁸¹ For Cubans, Spain and more

⁷⁸ This is a lyric from a song written in her honor called “Son para Pilar y Yemayá” sung by Vanito from Habana Abierta. Although not available in any recording, it is one of four songs Pilar features on her MySpace page. A chulapa is a working class woman of 19th century Madrid whose traditional garb is usually worn at fairs and costume competitions. It is a symbol of Castillian Madrid. Lucumí makes reference to an Afro-Cuban characteristic. Lucumí was an African religion from Nigeria that once in Cuba incorporated elements of Catholicism to make it a syncretic religion. It also refers to the Yoruba or Nigerian language as it is spoken in Cuba.

⁷⁹ Redruello Digital Interview.

⁸⁰ *Confianza* literally translates to trust but is used more readily to connote a relationship with someone of the friend or family type where you are at ease to share ideas, opinions and to act in certain ways because the informal nature of the relationship allows it. *Estar en casa, entre familia* reinforces the idea that along with comfort, one feels at home amongst family.

⁸¹ Yi-Fu and Steven Tuan. *Space and Place*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001) 102.

specifically, its capital city is a place, a location where the immigrant journey ends and the process of relocation begins. With the liberty to feel at home and make themselves at home at *Yemayá*, Cubans have made this physical place a Cuban space, they have actively claimed Madrid's *Yemayá*—a place within a place that through homing becomes a space that is markedly Cuban. If homing depends on the reclaiming and the reprocessing of habits that have been uprooted through migration, the close knit relationships between Pilar and Cubans, gave the latter the freedom to make *Yemayá* a place of belonging, a Cuban home, where the patterns of gathering in Cuba are recreated in Madrid. As Tuan argues, home is “a unit of space organized mentally and materially to satisfy a people’s real and perceived biosocial needs.”⁸² By feeling at home, Cubans create home, thus transforming a mere location for social interaction—a bar— into a Cuban space of interaction that fills the needs of community building away from the homeland. Here, home is able to signify both connectedness to Spain and affinities with Cuba as the space aims to anchor the *allá* of the island-gathering for conversation and *descarga* to the *aquí* in Madrid.⁸³ Making home is about the (re) creation of what Eva Hoffman would call “soils of significance” in which the affective qualities of home and the work of memory in their making cannot be divorced from the more concrete materialities of objects and rituals inherent in the process of leaving a country and settling with a sense of belonging in another.⁸⁴ *Yemayá* re-created a cultural space that evoked those found in Havana—be it *La Casa del Joven Creador* in Habana Vieja, the gatherings at the *Trova del Parque Almendares* or the tertulias of the *Hurón Azul* held in the patio of

⁸² Ibid

⁸³ Descarga is the Cuban word for jam session and while it usually refers to musicians engaging in the unscripted playing of music, it can also refer to a state of being surrounded by music, dance, poetry and other arts in the company of other Cubans.

⁸⁴ Eva Hoffman. *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, London: Minerva, 278.

the UNEAC (Union for Cuban Writers and Artists). Here, attachment to the host country is not trumped by the experience of immigration and does not deny attachment to the homeland but rather reinforces its successful trans-plantation. So says the song dedicated to the bar and its owner, “*Si un trocito de Cuba quieres, guantanaméate por allí, por el oasis de los aseres.*”⁸⁵



Figure 2.25 Pilar Zumel, Bar Yemayá



Figure 2.26 Cuban Actress Heidi García (*Efectos personales*, 2006), Bar Yemayá

By mapping this space making, this active creation of an *Habana madrileña*, I wish to show that far from the experiences of dislocation disruptive to a sense of belonging to a particular place, *Yemayá* offers Madrilian Cubans the sense of rootedness and allows for regrouping amongst those who have been uprooted. Hence, as Tuan has argued, the difference between place and space is rooted in the subject’s experience within the location where the former is static and the latter is in flux. The immigrant experience is defined by mobility and as such that which is static—place—cannot represent it. Perhaps the most visible manifestation of the movement that characterizes *Yemayá* and the Cuban experience in Madrid is the photographs that line the wooden

⁸⁵ “If you want to experience a piece of Cuba, make your way there [Yemayá], where you will find an oasis of Cuban friends.” Guantanamérate is a word invented by the songwriter that plays on the quintessential Cuban song Guantanamera to express the idea that Cubans should make their way to the bar to that tune because it leads to a Cuban place. Asere is the street vernacular for friend among Cubans.

walls of the small locale. Unlike those that hang on the walls of *La Negra Tomasa* that freeze Cuban time on the island, in the Revolution, here the pictures chronicle the flow of Cubans who have made their visit to Madrid's *Yemayá* whether as visitors or as locals. A materiality of Hoffman's soils of significance, these framed photographs provide a visual history of the coming and going that characterizes the trans-Atlantic relationship between Cuba and Spain, Cubans and migration to Madrid. In documenting the ebb and flow of Cubans to this Spanish place made Cuban space, the photographs serve as a living memory of a familial network based on continuity. *Yemayá* is not a place where Cubans arrive at the end of a migratory journey but rather the space where their community building in Madrid begins. Like a home—laden with photographs of the extended family, a statue of the Yemayá deity for protection within the home and Pilar as the welcoming mother figure—the bar's motto reinforces the stability and permanence of home at Yemayá while ensuring the perpetuation of a homecoming for subsequent Cubans: “*Allí donde te conocí, donde volveré a verte otra vez.*”

A Cuban space—one born of people expressing and enjoying a culture as they have known it and lived it, not a space where an image of a people and their culture is packaged for consumption or a battlefield for political action—the bar stands as a testament to the building of soils of significance in Madrid. It stands alone against the other two spaces here discussed, making *Yemayá* a place reconfigured into a Cuban community space where re-location is constituted doing away with dislocation. The assumption that home is something left behind by the Cuban migrant is challenged here and thus the trans-Atlantic rift between host nation—now the home away from home—and homeland is bridged as home is transported to Madrid. Aware of the importance of

Yemayá as a space for community building, Pilar's commitment extended from a small bar for social interaction in the 1990s to an ambitious cultural project linking Cubans with the Cuban arts in 2007. It was through the *Asociación Cultural Yemayá* and its gallery space in La Latina, the new addition to the bar *Yemayá* when it relocated in that year, that the intricacies of space as urban palimpsests in Madrid come to light.

La Latina's Urban Palimpsests: Lechería Turned Cuban Social Space

A walk down the narrow streets of Madrid's Soho or the Bronx of Europe as La Latina has been called proves to be a journey through the ethnic cauldron to which the neighborhood lays claim. Its name alone makes reference to a linguistic root that identifies the area as one belonging to the Castillian monarchs while in the context of modernity it extends to a language shared across the Atlantic with another continent. La Latina is now as much a zone that tells Spanish history as it is one that marks the history of arrival of foreign cultures to Madrid—Latin, Arabic, Asian, and Eastern European. The presence of Cuban culture is no exception to this rainbow of multiplicity. As one turns onto Calatrava Street, one finds a Halal meat market, a Dominican dance hall, an Ecuadorian *locutorio*, and a couple of Spanish bars.⁸⁶ As the numbers ascend, it is at number 16—the new home of *El bar Yemayá*—that the memorial nature of urban palimpsests becomes obvious for the observer of Madrid's geographic landscape. An edifice with an older façade of unvarnished wood, typical of the more historic sectors of

⁸⁶ A *locutorio* is a phone house that provides several communication services—Internet use, money wiring to other countries, and private phone booths for international calls. They are associated with foreigners as it is mostly immigrants who use these businesses services to communicate with family in their home countries. *Locutorios* began populating Madrid's cityscape during the 1990s and most, according to Consuelo Orovio, are known to be owned by Ecuadorian immigrants.

the city, the locale seems to correspond to a milk shop or lechería as the sign above its entrance reads. A vestige of the mid twentieth century, when milk was locally produced in small shops to be distributed door-to-door on a daily basis by the milkman, la lechería stands as an architectural testament to historical memory. Although the main function of that place is no longer what it claims to be by way of name, its physical presence has not been eradicated by the passage of time nor by the defunct need for such a place. In fact, there is a preservation project at hand in recycling the name of the location and the appropriation of the name that is meant to meld with the place's new purpose. *Yemayá* is thus a mix of old and new, the native and the foreign that tips the scales of grayness in a fashion similar to the concept of the trans-Atlantic, wavering between that which is Spanish and that which is Cuban. Although time has moved forward as it must in a chronological sense, evident in the name *Yemayá*—a manifestation of Cuban influence and or presence in Madrid, the past has not been erased. There is no intent on replacing an autochthonous place with a foreign place but to meld both in order to create a community space for Cubans in Madrid. At a time in Spain's history where, as the hodgepodge of businesses on Calatrava Street show (*see Figure 2.21*), multiculturalism is the direction in which Spanish society is headed, it is through the urban landscape that Cubans are visibly included in the city's multicultural imaginary.

In analyzing the multi-layered meaning behind the changes to this La Latina neighborhood place—the *Lechería*—it is useful to borrow the concept of palimpsests from the field of literary studies, in the likes of Andreas Huyssen.⁸⁷ In his book *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, Huyssen highlights the

⁸⁷ The practice of writing on the renovated surface of an old manuscript was common in the Middle Ages before paper became available. Since perfect removal of original writing was seldom achieved, it was possible to recover older texts.

effectiveness of reading memory traces in the likes of written palimpsests in the deconstruction of architecture. He says,

The trope of the palimpsest is inherently literary and tied to writing, but it can also be fruitfully used to discuss configurations of urban spaces and their unfolding time without making architecture and the city simply into text... Literary techniques of reading historically, intertextually, constructively and deconstructively at the same time can be woven into our understanding of urban spaces as lived spaces that shape collective imaginaries.⁸⁸

To deconstruct the *Lechería* as a Spanish place and re-construct it as a Cuban space, is an exercise in re-writing the history of an urban building whose history, far from being effaced has been preserved. While the original function of this place, revealed in its name, is extinct as are the material remains—machines, milk crates, glass bottles—that link it to milk production, the memory of its existence is not only palpable but more importantly legible. The past is inscribed in this place—intentionally as Pilar did not want to strip the edifice of its original character—lending itself (the past) to be recycled in the reading of its new function as *El bar Yemayá*. The memory of the *Lechería* is not effaced; the name that now co-identifies it as a Cuban space—*Yemayá*—does not trump its original name. In this imperfect erasure, a fundamental factor of palimpsests, the past and the present are juxtaposed to create a present past that in wavering between temporalities—then and now—reflects the mobility associated with the trans-Atlantic and, on a greater scale, the mobility associated with migratory movements.

The palimpsest framework allows a multi-level reading of this urban place as space that is based in both memory and mobility, renders history fluid rather than static. The new history to be read—in conjunction with the original history there inscribed—is

⁸⁸ Andreas Huyssen. *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*. (Cultural Memory In The Present) (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003) 7.

that of the Cuban diaspora and its presence in Madrid's landscape. This framework's lens of multiplicity allows a series of permutations of experience that reflects that constant flux of history—what was decades ago a Spanish milk plant is now a Cuban cultural space. What was once a place that produced a staple of sustenance and nourishment, continues to do so in metaphoric sense through culture. Similarly, the association of milk with motherhood cannot be divorced from the parallels drawn here between Pilar as a Spanish Mother of the Sea, who nourishes the Cuban community in Madrid through a familial and communal home space. The *Lechería/Yemayá* is an urban space, not place, because in keeping with the arguments presented here which connect space with continuity and place with pause, the location has not stopped in historical time—the time of the milk plant—but rather has overwritten that historical moment in a palimpsest fashion to chronicle the new meanings that the Cuban presence lend to this space. Also consistent with this understanding of space are the experiences to be had within it—marked by a freedom to appropriate the *Lechería/Yemayá* as home and the fostering of continuity to that appropriation for Cubans in Madrid. This perpetual act of homemaking speaks of tactics as they were understood by de Certeau practiced by those who have been uprooted to circumvent migratory dislocation. Within the context of Walter Benjamin's theorizations about space in *The Arcade Project*, as the *Lechería* takes on the character of an everyday space for Cubans—as is home—the Cuban experience is a legible writing on the wall of Madrid's changing social formation. In claiming this space as home, Cubans engage in a practice of everyday life where they exercise power and agency, creating a space that reflects the feeling of rootedness in Madrid.



Figure 2.27 “La Lechería” before it becomes Bar Yemayá



Figure 2.28 Pilar— owner of Bar Yemayá— putting up boards that transform “La Lechería” into El Bar Yemayá

Hence, the ways in which space is imagined relies on personal experience with a physical place that, like palimpsests, is embedded with several layers of meaning. This allows for multiple understandings of space that are worth examining as each is imbued with a sense inspired by the positioning of the subject. Here, I am interested in contrasting the experience of the passerby taking a stroll down Calatrava Street and that of Pilar herself. While the key difference these subject positions is a matter of objectivity in the case of the former and one of subjectivity in that of the latter, read together with the perceptions and experiences of Cubans already outlined provide a reading of *Lechería/Yemayá* as palimpsest. With no links to this locale and unaware of its function beyond the name that describes it, the passerby walks past the *Lechería/Yemayá* as he/she would any other edifice in Spain’s capital city. If it were noticed at all, given the fast paced nature of urban life, the locale would register at best as a vestige of a past time before Parmalat put extended shelf-life life, vacuum-sealed milk on the market, lessening

the daily need for fresh bottled milk. Passing by it any day of the week before 5 p.m. (and here the mid-afternoon Spanish siesta must be accounted for as well) would render it obsolete, a mere relic of what was once a local business now permanently closed. Visible to the passerby is simply a plexiglass sign that reads *Lechería*, underneath which is an oxidized gate covering the narrow entrance of what was once number 16 of Calatrava Street. What is imagined to have existed there is now a defunct place that serves no other purpose in the cityscape other than as a memorial of the place it once was in another time. In this way, the *Lechería* reads as a pause in historical time; its life and death recorded on the peeling wooden walls through name and the closed gate signal its existence as that of a place. If the passerby were to make a round down this La Latina neighborhood street past 5p.m. on any given day, the experience, if processed, would be of a different nature. Here, time is a factor in the ways in which this locale is imagined precisely because it is precisely when the *Lechería* opens for business, after five o'clock, that the act of writing over the edifice surface, the gesture of creating an urban spatial palimpsest, occurs. As oval wooden tablets etched with the name *Bar Yemayá* are hung over newly placed hooks on either side of the withering metal gate the *Lechería* begins to transform into a Cuburban (Cuban urban) space. The side beams where the tablets rest, where perhaps, as the framed markings on the wood indicate, there were glass casings exhibiting products from the milk shop in the past, now showcase the most contemporary layer of inscription added onto the building's façade.⁸⁹ The discernable presence of the *Lechería*, or the *scriptio inferior* (underwriting), stands a marker of historical memory while simultaneously recording present time; it reveals what this place once was and what it is now. The imperfect erasure of the original layer, the milk shop, coupled with the

⁸⁹ Here, I too as an observer, must imagine what was originally adorning the entrance of the building.

subsequent over-writing, the Cuban bar, speaks of the movement of historical time. The mobile nature of the tablets—they are fixed or written onto the surface and removed or erased from the surface—plays with time. When they are not in place, they visually disconnect the passerby from the today associated with this locale while linking the passerby to the present past when they are hung over the beams. It is in the case of the latter that place becomes space for the casual observer who experiences or registers the change or movement in time that the disparate temporalities present. Yemayá is thus an urban space marked by mobility and the flowing waves etched on its wooden tablets—symbolic of the Afro-Cuban Mother of the Seas and of the Cuban crossing of that sea—allow the passerby to visualize this flux and continuity.

For the casual observer or passerby, *Yemayá* will never be just that—a bar with a Cuban name. It will however always be a Spanish place—a milk shop of a past era—that at times may have more than one name to go by.⁹⁰ The removable tablets that serve as identification tags may or may not be present at a given time but the *Lechería* sign is a permanent fixture on the façade. A marker of stability, it lends itself to a reading of the metaphoric rootedness to be found in this locale by the Cubans who frequent it and reinforces the stability associated with the trope of home. The conscious decision to maintain the *Lechería* sign speaks of Pilar's intention to meld the old with the new, the native with the foreign in such a way that the Spanish root of this place will not be effaced by Cuban influence while the Cuban element will not be overshadowed by the Spanish origin either. It is an act in negotiation, of making her Spanish place, a Cuban space where the original character of both is kept, creating a spatial *ajiaco* to borrow

⁹⁰ This bar is listed under both names—*Lechería* and *Bar Yemayá*—in Madrid city guides that are online and in published sources like the weekly *Guía del Ocio* (Guide of Happenings/Leisure Activities in Madrid).

Fernando Ortiz's term.⁹¹ By negotiating the multiple meanings of space and the multiple experiences of and with space, Pilar imagines Yemayá as social space and partakes in its production. Henri Lefebvre has argued that social space is a social product, "a product of ever-changing socio-political and economic negotiations that we produce."⁹² For Pilar, *Yemayá* is a place of business from which she derives her livelihood but it is also a social space for Cuban gathering. Yemayá is a product of an immigrant presence in Madrid that seeks a community space to fulfill socio-political needs born of the relocation process. In the absence of other inclusive spaces for community building, Cubans negotiate (although spontaneously as already discussed) the production of social space with the physical place that Pilar provides. Pilar in turn negotiates her entrepreneurial (economic) needs with a personal commitment to unite Cubans in Madrid. This commitment, itself a product of a socio-political affinity with Cubans born two decades earlier, propels the Cuban appropriation of *Yemayá* for their social purposes. By opening her actual home to Cubans since the 1970s, she produced a familial relationship that turned a Spanish home into a Cuban social space and thus the production of that social space begun in the home is transported to *Yemayá* and transposed on the *Lechería*. The multiple layers of negotiation produce multiple meanings that had the potential to over-write the *Lechería* and its history. However, the hesitance to efface the original place and its meaning is itself another act of negotiation on Pilar's part. It entails the inclusion of the new ethnic influence on the block—in keeping with the character that sets La Latina apart from other

⁹¹ Fernando Ortiz was a Cuban scholar who provided Cuban studies with the trope of the *ajiaco* to understand the multi-faceted nature of Cuban culture. An *ajiaco*, or Cuban stew, is seen as the perfect metaphor to describe a culture where the ingredients of the stew come together to make one dish (culture) but the individual elements that have made the stew (African influence, Spanish influence, Indigenous influence), are still discernable within the stew. The *ajiaco* serves as an antithesis to the melting pot metaphor for assimilation.

⁹² Henri Lefebvre. *The Production of Space*, (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992) 31.

Madrid neighborhoods—without eradicating the old influences on the block. In palimpsest speak, by showing both the original and current writing on the wall, the urban spatial *ajiaco* is successfully negotiated as is the production of Cuban social space.

Lechería Turned Cuban Gallery Space



Figure 2.29 Gallery Space, Adjacent to Bar Yemayá

Cultural considerations motivate the creation of palimpsests and those of an urban spatial nature are no different. The former Spanish *Lechería* at number 16 of Calatrava Street in Madrid's La Latina houses not only *Bar Yemayá* but also an adjacent gallery space that showcases the Cuban arts. While the bar fills the need for social interaction, as discussed previously, the gallery bridges a gap between the community and Cuban artists who are producing film, photography, theatre, and music in Madrid. The gallery fills a cultural void that by connecting the Cuban community with its arts and artists achieves a social interaction based on sharing culture and cultural expressions. As the Cuban population in Madrid proliferated so did the Cuban arts. Cuban cultural visibility heightened during the 1990s and into the new millennium—either by way of immigration or as a result of a national fever for all things Cuban that swept Spain—to be discussed in

the subsequent chapters. As the number of Cuban artists producing work that reflected the immigrant experience grew considerably in contrast to spaces in which to showcase their work, Pilar committed to an expansive project dedicated to Cuban culture that not only reflected this increased Cuban visibility in Madrid but also enhanced it.

Pilar's cultural project was two-fold: the creation of a cultural organization called *Asociación Cultural Yemayá* and the building of a gallery space for Cuban artists to share their work with the community. The *Asociación* was a formal commitment to ensuring a cultural program dedicated to the Cuban arts was established, relying on the gallery space to exhibit these art forms. Although open to anyone interested in promoting Cuban culture in Madrid, the *Asociación* is made up of mainly Cuban artists who live in the capital city but also those who reside in other European nations as well as artists who live on the island but make it a point to pass by when working in Spain.⁹³ Events that fill the *Asociación's* weekly schedule at the gallery are limited only by their relation to Cuban culture and include poetry readings, music concerts, theatre productions, photo and art exhibits, book presentations, film screenings and ceramic expositions. Photography contests where the aim is to capture the immigrant experience in La Latina and film festivals dedicated specifically to viewing shorts produced by Cubans in Madrid, are part of the activities that also dabble their calendar.⁹⁴ The *Asociación* also partakes in various community service projects and fundraising relief efforts to send varying forms of aid to Cubans on the island.

⁹³ There is a membership of 50 Euros to which members can subscribe. The proceeds of the membership are used to finance the costs associated with the events that take place at the gallery. Membership is not necessary to attend the events nor to be a featured artist at an event. There is also no cover charge to attend the events sponsored by the *Asociación*.

It is important to note that this cultural project was not pre-conceived as was the re-opening of *Bar Yemayá*, but it was place that inspired Pilar to embark on the project. The bar's new location, the *Lechería* in La Latina, had an adjacent warehouse that although small was not in use. As the musicians, writers, and other artists responsible for the *descargas* at her house and later the original *Yemayá* in Chueca continued to frequent the new *Yemayá*, they began to imagine the adjacent warehouse as one dedicated to the Cuban arts and thus Pilar did not seek artists to launch the association/gallery project as much as Cuban artists sought to establish a cultural space in La Latina through her. In this way, the same dynamic that characterized the *Bar Yemayá* years earlier—appropriating a Spanish place and converting it into a Cuban space—came to define its adjacent gallery. It is hence another manifestation of the tactics, to use de Certeau's term, practiced by those with little or no economic power to assert their presence in the Madrilian geography. Although less spontaneous in its creation, the gallery nonetheless was inspired by the countless Cuban artists who had been spontaneously or informally sharing their work with other *Yemayá* patrons in the Chueca location. The demand for a formal space in which to share Cuban cultural forms as the community of artists grew speaks of the creation of space as social product. Far from freezing Cuban culture in a nostalgic era or a revolutionary one and packaging it for consumption in the likes of *La Negra Tomasa* or limiting its expression to artists who easily conform to a political position like the *Fundación Hispano Cubana*, the gallery responds to the need for an unlabelled now in Cuban cultural production. Whether it is Afro-Cuban, mulatto, or white, immigrant, exile, or Velvet exile, Cuban artists are valued for what they say about a Cuban immigrant experience rooted in the present that is not influenced by a consumer

eye to which it must cater in its expression. Because the now of culture is in constant flux, it cannot be contained by static representations nor can it be limited to one of two loci of enunciation—exoticism or anti-Castro rhetoric. By showcasing new text, new artists, new art forms, that movement forward in cultural time comes to distinguish the *Yemayá* gallery as what Soja would consider a third space that contests the cultural binary by which the Cuban diaspora in Madrid is represented.

While the gallery is a formal artistic space it is, in feeling, an extension of the social space produced next door at *Bar Yemayá* because the conditions that shaped the erection of the bar also shape the erection of the cultural space. There is, as the waves associated with the deity Yemayá, continuity and movement both in its creation and in the cultural expressions to be experienced within it. Although it is a formal gallery - complete with lighting effects, stage, seating, projection equipment, and walls designed for installations—it retains the informal social ambiance of the adjacent *Yemayá*. In the introduction of his 1976 book *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, Brian O’Doherty suggests that the gallery space is imbued with a sanctity similar to that of a medieval church from its very construction to the experience the visitor has inside it. He describes the physical structure of the gallery in the following way,

The outside world must not come in, so windows are usually sealed off. Walls are painted white. The ceiling becomes the source of light. The wooden floor is polished so that you click along clinically, or carpeted so that you pound around soundlessly, resting the feet while the eyes have at the wall... Unshadowed, white, clean, artificial—the space is devoted to the technology of esthetics.⁹⁵

Here, O’Doherty explains how a gallery is envisioned as a space akin to a museum, where there is an austerity and uninterrupted silence that permeates the space where art

⁹⁵ Brian O’Doherty and Thomas McEvilley. *Inside The White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) 15.

forms are exhibited. Closed, austere, and unnatural, the gallery seems to border on bodily discomfort for the observer within the space as everything within it becomes a sacred object to be revered to the point of fear of the object and fear of interaction with it lest it be harmed by the observer's presence. O'Doherty's observations are suggestive, as they link the physical space of the gallery with the observer's senses or bodily experiences of it. As has been argued throughout this chapter, experience is what makes a place a space—of belonging, of gathering, of producing and consuming cultural forms, of political struggle, of creative genius. The gallery space produces a Cartesian paradox, where the body seems to intrude on the space yet the eyes through which the space and its art forms are experienced do not perturb the gallery space nor do the thoughts provoked by both space and object. O'Doherty sees the body becoming an inanimate object that is out of place in the gallery space, “an odd piece of furniture... superfluous, an intrusion. The space offers the thought that while eyes and minds are welcome, space-occupying bodies are not.”⁹⁶ Thus he uses the installation shot metaphor to describe the body in relation to the gallery space. The observer, for O'Doherty, is there but not, as in an installation photograph that is *sans* figures; the observer is pictured behind the camera, not by the camera. Once the body obstructs what seems to be the perfect harmony between space and exhibited work, there is an irreparable absence of comfort that inhibits the body to feel that it experiences the space with all its senses.

While *Yemayá* is a typical gallery space in that it shares some of the formal characteristics O'Doherty describes with similar spaces, it is also markedly atypical. There is a sanctity associated with the space but it is derived from the guiding spirit of the Afro-Cuban deity that is housed there. It is a welcoming sanctity—the space is ‘la casa de

⁹⁶ Ibid

Yemayá,’ ‘la casa de los cubanos’—not a sanctity that renders the subject unworthy to be in its midst. The sense of pious respect, religiously inclined or not, for the Mother of the Sea that all have crossed, accompanies being in the deity’s home. Respect replaces the fear that O’Doherty associates with the gallery space and the sense of obstructing the space through the bodily presence is replaced by a sense of creating space by having the community populate it. Instead of observers, *Yemayá* is frequented by participators in the aesthetic experience who far from being uneasy within the space, actively engage with it and with the art forms there, producing social space within the gallery space. Instead of photographers, they are pictured in the metaphoric photograph. *Yemayá’s* gallery space cannot exist *sans figures* because it is the people who create there, who experience cultural expression there, who set it apart from an “unshadowed, clean, white, artificial” gallery space (15).

The *Asociación Cultural Yemayá’s* gallery space is a natural one because its meaning is constructed by the people who frequent it and it is that freedom to chronicle the changing people, the changing culture that is there expressed that sets it apart from gallery spaces that in a museum-like manner, archive culture as an artifact petrified in historic time. This mobile character impedes the overwhelming sense of being out of place—like an unwanted piece of furniture to use O’Doherty’s example—instead fostering a sense of belonging within this space for multiple people at multiple times. As the context that shaped the gallery space becomes content the physical space no longer frames Cuban culture but is framed by it. Thus, Cuban culture is in place within the *Yemayá* gallery space as is the Cuban community—artists and audience alike—that visit the space. It is the interaction within that space—between artist and audience through

different art forms that defines the gallery, not the gallery that defines what occurs between art and its visual consumers. Aware of the ease with which the audience of Yemayá will stand before the cultural expressions there displayed, Cuban artists are empowered by an unparalleled autonomy to create works that will not be the material of unengaged observation and fear but of active engagement with art that brings culture alive. Formal in its form, informal in its experience, always a gallery space in flux—a concert hall on Monday, a theatre stage on Tuesday, the walls of a painter's exhibit on Wednesday, a viewing room for a Cuban documentary on Thursday, the space on which Cuban ceramics are displayed on Friday, the presentation room for a Cuban novel on Saturday and the meeting space for tertulia Sundays—*Yemayá's* gallery is a spatial *ajiacó* in Madrid's La Latina.

The Image in Imagine: *Bar Yemayá* Promoted

An analysis of space and place would not be complete in recent times without taking the virtual world into account. Placing oneself in a space that one can lay claim to has become an increasingly popular concept as technology has facilitated the appropriation of niches in virtual space. Whether it is through blogs, Facebook, or MySpace, the creation of personal space, space that can be called one's own, is a communication fad that has become a primary source for social networking across the globe. MySpace is, as its name indicates, perhaps the example par excellence of this need for claiming a space, albeit virtual, through which contact is established with an online community. With endless options for tailoring the space to the self—who to add as a

friend, what information to include in your profile, which language will be used on your page—MySpace pages reflect how the individual imagines him/herself, his/her space and him/herself within that space. It is an act of creating space and marking it as one of belonging for the self—my space. As public as it is private, as inclusive as it is exclusive, as local as it is global, the only constants are the element of the personal and the element of continuous change—friends, backgrounds, moods.

Bar Yemayá and its adjacent gallery space function in a similar manner to a MySpace page. Pilar provides the (home) page, Cubans personalize it. Both spaces are public in that they are open to anyone without restrictions, but it is also a private space in that it is an intimate, homelike setting for a community to interact socially and through the arts. While it is inclusive of any art forms created by Cubans, it is exclusive in that the majority of its frequenters belong to a younger generation in their 30s and 40s whose cultural referent begins after the Cuban Revolution. Thus, the nostalgia that imbues more traditional Cuban spaces is absent here, replaced by contemporary forms of music, art, painting and literature that reflect the flux of Cuban culture. While these spaces are local and localizable in Madrid's geography and the social interactions that occur in the bar and the gallery space are specific to a Cuban diaspora in Spain's capital city, the immigrant experience that seeks home and community away from the homeland is universal. The people who make *Yemayá* 'la casa de los cubanos en Madrid' are those who live there as much as those who stop by from Cuba and other corners of the world, seeking to reconnect with Cubans and their culture. Consistently a home away from home, consistently a personalized and personable Cuban space, consistently chronicling

the now of Cuban culture, *Yemayá* and its gallery are urban my-spaces of Madrid's La Latina.

It is thus fitting that *Bar Yemayá*, the *Asociación* and the gallery project are advertised primarily through MySpace. Through the blog, all the events that take place at the *Yemayá* gallery are chronicled online via Pilar's MySpace page dedicated to cultural center, under the name *Yemayá Cultural*. It is through this virtual space that a global network is able to experience the Cuban spaces that have been locally created in Madrid. Here, the audio-visual element is of key importance as it is through the eyes and ears that space is experienced. Although the experience with these spaces is limited in the absence of physical place, for the virtual observer sound and image are the bridges linking him/her to *Yemayá* and the gallery. Technology allows the posting of videos on the site, the uploading of songs by artists who hold concerts in the gallery space, and the creation of picture collages decorating the page's background that capture the events and experiences at *Yemayá*. For a glimpse at the social life that evolves daily at the bar, Pilar has dedicated her personal MySpace page—under the name *Yemayá*—to the business where videos, images, and sounds of the *Bar Yemayá* are accessible to visitors of the MySpace community. The activities sponsored by the *Asociación* are announced biweekly via email to those who are on their listserve.

Despite the benefits that technology offers—faster, more accessible information—more practical and traditional ways of promoting *Yemayá* are still in place. Word of mouth is a primary promotional tool as are printed flyers. While *Yemayá* is a public business and the gallery space is also open to the public, neither locales are necessarily recognizable places for the general public because they are not

commercialized on the same scale as *La Negra Tomasa* or *Mamá Inés* and visibility is greatly reduced because La Latina is removed from the tourist center of Madrid. *Yemayá* and the gallery are in the category of neighborhood spaces for locals. The locals who make their way there do so because they know Pilar, know artists who showcase at *Yemayá*, or belong to other Cuban circles and organizations whose members are in some way connected to the bar and gallery. Both spaces are fairly popular amongst younger Cubans who are interested in engagement with the Cuban arts as well as others with similar interest in Cuban culture. Akin to inviting someone to your home, this ‘being in the know’ seems indicative of spaces that are private like the home or underground in the case of a business more so than public spaces. While the original *Yemayá* in Chueca fits this description more accurately, it does not seem to be the case for the locale in the La Latina location. Whereas the first *Yemayá* was a hangout for Cuban artists that naturally took on a private feel while still being a public business, the current *Yemayá* co-exists with a broader cultural project that promotes Cuban culture in Madrid and heightens its visibility, lessening the private aura of both spaces.

For tourists, locals, and passersby who are unaware of the *Yemayá* bar-gallery complex in La Latina, they may come to know it through the traditional medium of the flyer. My interest in the promotional material for *Yemayá* lies in the montage of images that Pilar has chosen to represent her business in Madrid that differ from the choices made by promoters of commercialized Cuban spaces in the Sol sector of the city. The ways in which these places are imagined—communicated through images—speak of the intention behind the places’ establishment and clearly distinguish the place where culture is sold from the space where culture is produced. Whereas the Afro-Cuban *santera* and

slave model have been exploited by the former, it is never associated with the latter. Pilar identifies with the Afro-Cuban deity Yemayá and understands her relationship with the Cuban community as one of a mother figure that protects her children once they've crossed the Atlantic and gives them a place to call home. In fact, Pilar's profile picture on her personal MySpace page is a picture of the black deity's statue which overlooks the bar at her business, clad with multi-colored beads, as a visual sign of her identification with the goddess. As an act of homage to her and in following Cuban tradition, Pilar has placed a statue of the deity in the bar.⁹⁷ Images of Yemayá do not make the promotional material for the bar nor for that of the *Asociación Cultural* which limits its image to that of a wave in motion.

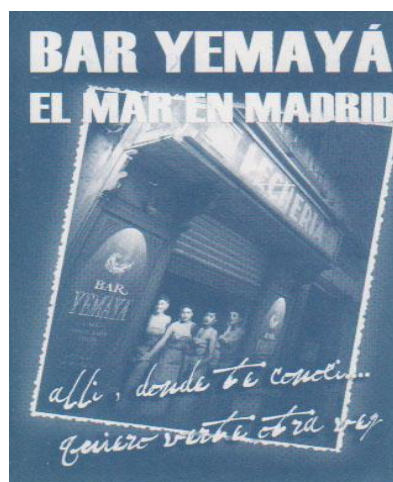


Figure 2.30 Promotional Material
Bar Yemayá



Figure 2.31 Promotional Material
Bar Yemayá (Backside)

The flyer for *Yemayá* depicts a photo montage of the *Lechería*'s front door, tablets in place, the gate almost completely open to expose a Cuban female quartet (see *Figures 2.30 and 2.31*). The deep blue hue of the images resembles the color of the sea, the color of Yemayá. The bold white phrases that contrast the sea blue promote the business: BAR

⁹⁷ In the Santería religion, each deity is associated with a set of colors. Beaded necklaces represent those saints, according to their colors. It is common practice to place an initiates' necklace over the saint's statue in the home for safekeeping when not being worn.

YEMAYÁ, EL MAR EN MADRID, localizing Yemayá's sea in Madrid. The flyer captures the urban palimpsests here discussed while adding several other layers of meaning to the figurative writing on *Yemayá's* walls. More than a promotion for a bar, the flyer takes on the character of an old photograph with visibly crinkled edges that has been dedicated to the person who holds it as an invitation to return to this familiar place captured by the camera. "*Allí donde te conocí, quiero verte otra vez*"—the opening lyrics of famous Caribbean song appears in a handwritten cursive, indicative of such a dedicatory phrase.⁹⁸ Perhaps it is a vestige of Pilar's pen pal days. The photograph itself is off-center, as if the photographer purposely sought an angle that would capture all the components of the entrance equally, not affording any component more or less photographic space. The lighting effects highlight the *Lechería* sign, the part of the oval tablets that read *Bar Yemayá* along with the emblematic wave, and two of the four singers as if they are the focal points of the invitation. In the shadow, undetected, is the entrance to the gallery space. In a spatial switch known only to those familiar with the *Yemayá* complex, the quartet's performance is in the bar space and not in the gallery. It is as if the gallery space is a hidden secret, unveiled through the bar experience that is past that gate. Las D'Aida—the 1950s Cuban *filin* group—seem to make *Yemayá* their stage, the iron gate of the *Lechería* rising above them like a curtain at a concert hall.⁹⁹ One of the vocalists welcomes the observer imagined to be looking at the bar's entrance, producing a *filin* of invitation—walk into the bar, experience their music. It is somewhat misleading,

⁹⁸ "Allí" is a song written by the Puerto Rican composer Pedro Flores in the 1940s.

⁹⁹ *Filin* or "feeling" was a musical movement which combined Cuban rhythms with harmonies and melodies influenced by North American jazz in the 1940s and 1950s. One vocalist here pictured, Omara Portuondo, was the only female artist to partake in the Buena Vista Social Club project in 1997 that made Cuban musicians of that era the most recognizable and commercialized sound of Cuba. Moraima Secada, another vocalist, works at Madrid's *La Negra Tomasa* as a performer and an *espiritista*—a medium who works with dead spirits to answer questions of the living as to their future.

their imposed image at the entrance of Yemayá bordering on act of anachronic propagandist nostalgia. Certainly the music of old is no more than a tune that may be playing on a CD at *Yemayá* on a given afternoon. The type of music produced or promoted there is that of a new wave of Cubans, the grandchildren of Las D'Aida. Writing their image onto the picture—again the work of technology—reinforces the idea of palimpsests at work within this place made space. Las D'Aida are the foundation, the original parchment like the *Lechería*, upon which the new history of Cuban culture in Madrid has been written. The enhanced photograph chronicles Pilar's experiences with Cuban culture—what began with D'Aida has evolved into *Yemayá*, what spatially began as a *lechería* is now a social and cultural center. *Yemayá* is imagined as a progression of historic time and not a pause in historic time, thus a space not a place, where the then and the now co-exist. There is no nostalgia for what was, but rather a remembering of what was that led to what is now in this space.

Behind the camera, Pilar pictures *Yemayá* as multiple experiences over multiple historic times. The story of Madrid's changing geography is told by the images of a La Latina of the past meshing with a La Latina of the present. As the photographer, Pilar experiences the space but is removed from its image, in the same way she stepped back to allow Cubans to make of *Yemayá* their urban my-space in Madrid. The Cuban sea is imagined to have been brought to La Latina via Mother Yemayá in spirit, motherly Pilar in the flesh. Afro-Cuban female deity, Spanish female owner and promoter (behind the camera), mulata female quartet, *la casa, la música, la literatura, la poesía, las artes*, the feminine Other generates the expression of *lo cubano* in *la madre patria*. Assembled, the components of the image welcome the observer to relive an experience by returning to

this familiar space, *allí donde te conocí*. For Cubans in Madrid the *allí* may be Cuba, or a piece of Cuba—el mar en Madrid—or it may, like the movement of the trans-Atlantic waves, like the steps of the casual walker in the city, be in constant flux. What remains consistent is *Yemayá* as a Cuban home space—an *allí* that marks La Latina's urban landscape with the Cuban presence and maps Madrid's Cuban geography.

Chapter 3. Cubans Seen, Cubans Heard: The Boom of Cuban Music in Spain

This chapter turns to the industry of cultural production—music in particular—for an understanding of the Cuban migratory experience in Spain. In analyzing the musical and filmic productions that take place in the 1990s in Madrid, the chapter looks at the ways in which an economically downtrodden 1990s Cuba allows Cuban artists to cash in on the culture industry that is Cubanophilic. The Special Period, as the decade is known, produced a need on both sides of the Atlantic. Cuba and its artists needed foreign investment in its culture industry for survival and Spain needed to reestablish its economic ties with Cuba through various sectors that would allow it to historically vindicate this former colony's loss a century earlier. Investment in Cuban culture thus fills a Messianic role for Spain that as discussed in earlier chapters heals the historic wound of 1898. In so doing, the Spanish market reverts to discourses about race, gender and the neo-colonial condition in the marketing of Cuban artists in Spain. The type of Cuban music and the types of filmic images (also the focus of chapters 4 and 5) and of literature (chapter 6) that are produced and marketed in Spain reflect discourses about the Cuban immigrant experience while taking the culture industry's needs into account. Taking into account that the artists' subject position is atypical—their migratory experience is conditioned by a product (sound or image) that is in demand by a market of consumers—, they nonetheless form part of the Cuban immigrant community and are

subject to the same discourses that define the relationship between themselves and their host country. That relationship—a century after Cuban independence from Spain—is still marked by vestiges of the colonial condition.

The last decade of the twentieth century proved to be a time of significant changes in Cuban cultural production. The trying economic times of the Special Period that led to the relaxing of restrictions on foreign investment in Cuba extended to its culture industry, making it one of the most profitable sectors of the Cuban economy. Island culture—song, dance, art, photography, film—was not only aggressively sold to tourists but the lure of all things Cuban made island cultural forms increasingly sellable. Cuban culture became a hot commodity as Manolín, *el Médico de la Salsa*, aptly captures in the chorus of his song “Somos lo que hay.”¹ If Cuban culture was what *la gente* sought to consume, Cuban artists were able to meet the needs and demands of a worldwide market intrigued by a Cuba recently open to investment in its culture industry.²

The 1990s was the decade of the Buena Vista Social Club in both image and sound.³ The 1997 documentary about a host of forgotten 1930s musicians brought an

¹ The chorus of this 1998 song “We Are It” is: “*Somos los que hay, lo que se vende como pan caliente, lo que prefiere y pide la gente, lo que se agota en el Mercado, lo que se escucha en todos lados.*” This translates to “We are It—what is hot, what is selling like freshly baked bread, what people prefer and ask for, what sells out in the Market, what is heard everywhere.” Here, Market makes reference to the culture industry’s global consumer market.

² *La gente* translates to ‘the people.’ However, in the context of this song, Manolín makes reference to an imagined community of consumers in the global market—the people whose demand for Cuban music drives the culture industry’s production.

³ The Buena Vista Social Club was a club in Havana, Cuba that held dances and musical activities, becoming a popular location for musicians to meet and play during the 1940s. In the 1990s, nearly 50 years after the club was closed, it inspired a recording made by Cuban musician Juan de Marcos González and American guitarist Ry Cooder with traditional Cuban musicians, some of whom were veterans who had performed at the club during the height of its popularity. The recording, named *Buena Vista Social Club*,

until then isolated island and its musical culture into the world market through the movie screen and through musical productions. *Buena Vista Social Club*, the group's recording that served as the soundtrack for the documentary, was soon followed by productions individually recorded by each of its musicians. All were successful under the global music category. Artists like Compay Segundo and Ibrahim Ferrer became synonymous of Cuba and its music—albeit with a nostalgic undertone of decades past—and the “Chan Chan” became the internationally recognized sound of the island.⁴ Despite being out of tune with current music trends of a 1990s Cuba, it was the classic *son* and *guajira* music played by these octogenarian musicians that put Cuba and its music on the map for a global market and with it an image of an island frozen in historic time.⁵ The Buena Vista phenomenon highlighted what Ned Sublette notes is the tradition of two parallel types of Cuban music—one for domestic consumption and one for export. Buena Vista's success

became an international success, and the ensemble performed in Amsterdam in 1998 and later in New York City's Carnegie Hall. German director Wim Wenders captured the performance on film, turning it into a documentary that included interviews with the musicians conducted in Havana. Wim Wenders's film, also called *Buena Vista Social Club*, was receiving an Academy Award nomination for Best Documentary feature and winning numerous accolades including Best Documentary at the European Film Awards.

⁴ Compay Segundo and Ibrahim Ferrer were lead singers of the Buena Vista Social Club project and as the oldest musicians featured in the documentary were the most memorable amongst the group. “Chan Chan”—a *son* composed by Compay Segundo—is the first song on the Buena Vista Social Club album. This version of “Chan Chan” became a worldwide success and its first four chords are among the most well-known in Cuban music.

⁵ *Son cubano* is a style of music that originated in Cuba and gained worldwide popularity in the 1930s. It combines call-and-response singing with the structure and elements of the Spanish peasant's guitar and language as well as African rhythms and percussion instruments. Due to its adaptability, musicologists such as Ned Sublette, consider it the mother form of Cuban music in the twentieth century. In New York City, it mixed with other musical styles to influence the creation of salsa music. The Cuban *son* is one of the most influential and widespread forms of Latin American music: its derivatives and fusions have spread across the world. *Guajira* is a form of Cuban countryside music often sung by a single musician accompanying himself on guitar, known as a troubadour. The lyrics of the *guajira* typically extol the beauty of the Cuban countryside and the lifestyle of the *guajiros*—countryside peasants. The combination of the *guajira* with the rhythm of the *son* produced another genre called the *guajira-son*.

in Europe yet little known presence on the island neatly fits the trend of exported and exportable Cuban music.⁶ It also proves, in lines with arguments presented in the previous chapter, that the business of selling nostalgia is a successful and lucrative one.

While the symbolic capital that Cuban culture acquired via the Buena Vista fever is undisputedly a factor in the success of Cuban music and film in a global market, its members were not the first artists to capture Europe's attention during the Special Period.⁷ Before there was Buena Vista there was Habana Abierta—a Cuban rock fusion group signed by a Madrid label in 1993 that would also be the subject of a documentary shot in Havana a decade later. After Buena Vista there was Orishas—a Cuban hip hop group that soared to stardom in Europe after a Spanish label signed them in 1998. I analyze both of these Cuban musical groups in this chapter (and actually continue my discussion of Habana Abierta in chapter 4). They represent opposite ends of a musical spectrum, rock and rap, that are bound by two elements: both types of music draw from American genres and thus are considered subversive musical forms in Cuba and both speak lyrically to the migratory experience of the Cuban subject (artist) transplanted to Spain. Their music contests the myth of Cuba's insularity—its isolation from world culture until the 1990s and addresses the Cuban diasporic condition in Madrid from the artists' perspective. The lure of the forbidden art produced by Habana Abierta and Orishas coupled with a history of trans-Atlantic cultural exchanges between Cuba and Spain paved the way for the new sounds of Cuban music to attract the ears of Spanish

⁶ Ned Sublette. *Cuba and Its Music*, 333. 2005

⁷ Symbolic capital is a concept coined by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu that refers to honor, prestige or recognition that functions as an authoritative embodiment of cultural value.

producers and caught the eye of Spanish film directors. The latter salvaged the Cuban music and film industry from extinction and the Messianic discourses that surround that relationship demonstrate—within the culture industry—the vestiges of imperial nostalgia that have shaped the artists’ experience as artists who form part of the Cuban diaspora in Spain.⁸ It is an experience reflected in their lyrics as well as in the subject matter of cinematographic co-productions produced between Spain and Cuba during the 1990s, the latter of which will be discussed in the following chapters.

Interested in the social representation that both music and film allow as well as the marketing of contemporary Cuban artists via both venues, I focus on how the industry of cultural production configures contemporary Cuban culture and the negotiations that take place in packaging it for consumption. With the importance that Cuban music has had for national identity, and more precisely for Cuban racial identity as discussed by Alejo Carpentier in *Cuba and Its Music*, it is the most popular outlet for expression as an empowering cultural medium. In the midst of economic crisis, the music industry is a profitable one for Cuban artists signed by Spanish labels and as the popularity of Cuban music creates a demand for more artists on the market, it is clear that Cuban music fills a need for both a local sound that is identified as Cuban as well as a global sound that obliterates the necessity for origin specificity. Thus, it is my contention that Cuban artists engage their art in the performativity of Cuban identity as a form of drag. This identity is at times Caribbean and at times global, at times African and at times mulatto (biracial), and within Spain—at times marginalized and at times centered. The marketing of the

⁸ With the onset of the Special Period in the 1990s, there were no resources to keep musical and filmic production alive. It was through the signing of artists to Spanish record labels and Spanish investment in co-produced films that the music and film industries were respectively kept alive into the present.

musical productions of Habana Abierta and Orishas are prime examples of how the former satisfies the commercial demand for “world beat” music that the latter does not. This demand for “world beat” music avoids the pitfalls of exoticizing or fetishizing of “Third World” artists and, as Michele Mattelart points out, the superficial representations of history and culture through its global vision of culture.⁹ Both the music of Orishas and of Habana Abierta exemplify how culture—as George Yúdice argues in *The Expediency of Culture*—becomes a resource in an era of accelerated globalization. Yúdice contends that culture is increasingly wielded as a resource for both sociopolitical and economic amelioration and the rise of cultural capitalism.¹⁰ In the case of Spain and Cuba during the Special Period, it is culture, herein musical culture and in later chapters the filmic and literary facet of cultural production, which allows Spanish investment to sooth the flailing Cuban economy via domination of its culture industry. Cuba provides the artists and their cultural capital, Spain provides access to the industry, means of production and promotion, establishing cultural capitalism in Cuba and trans-Atlantically once these artists begin to produce from Spain. Although successful by Cuban standards—a concert welcoming them back to island after a decade of having left Cuba to pursue their music in Spain was the subject of an ICAIC/Spanish film studio documentary—Habana Abierta is not a household name among Spanish youth. In Spanish popular culture they certainly don’t relish in the popularity that Orishas (the top selling Grammy Award winning rap group) has been for the past decade. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital, I attribute Orishas’s success, in part, to the recognition of a specifically Cuban

⁹ Michele Mattelart, “Global Image Markets,” *Cultural Studies Guide*, ed. John Storey (England: Pearson Education, 1994) 47.

¹⁰ George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture*. (Chapel Hill: Duke University Press, 2009) 10.

sound by Spanish audiences. As Orishas mix traditional Cuban genres like *son* with their raps, the distinguishable Cuban element is easily marketed and sold. Because the Afro-Cuban identity of this group is the key to their lyrics, their image, and their marketability, I explore race as a factor in the lucrative business of selling the exotic. Here, Benjamin's considerations of the role that mediums play in reconfiguring this immigrant group's culture as marketed through the culture industry are key.

While keeping in mind the differences between music and film—the heard and the seen, the sung lyrics and the spoken script, live performance and pre-recorded fictive form—the element of performativity will link both cultural forms in my analysis. It is in the following chapter dedicated to filmic images that the intersection between performativity and the culture industry are most evident as selling a Cuban image relies on the resurfacing of binary models of social interaction typical of the colonial period—mainly the white master/black slave dichotomy. Selling Cuba after the 1990s in image is centered on vindicating the Spanish loss of Cuba that reverts filmic productions to reconfigurations of the colonial condition disguised in contemporary settings.¹¹ It is a

¹¹ An example of this occurs in the movie *Un rey en la Habana* (A King in Havana) discussed at length in Chapter 5. Yolo is an attractive young woman whose family depends on her to resolve their economic hardship by marrying a rich Spaniard. His intention is to bring her back to Madrid where she will be enslaved in a brothel. When he dies, her neighbor – a biracial man is given a mask that resembles the dead man's European face and is sent on a wild chase through Spain to find his riches and bring them back to Cuba. He takes with him his sidekick, an Afro-Cuban little person who is subject to racial slurs throughout the movie and who is often referred to in animalistic terms. In playing his part as a Spaniard, the neighbor reinforces the slurs and stereotypes. Once their scam is discovered by Spanish authorities they are both treated like the “undesirable black immigrants” they are for Spanish society.

marketing strategy that hinders the societal integration of Cubans in Spain while relegating them to the realm of the spectacular minority.¹²

A Long Musical Journey

*Una linda sevillana
le decía a su maridito
Me vuelvo loca chiquito
por la música cubana....*¹³

Orishas's attraction to Spain and France and their success among audiences in both countries form part of a long trans-Atlantic musical history that unites Cuba to these European nations. For over half a century, Spain and France have provided habitats for Cuban musical production. The history of this musical journey begins with the Spanish Conquest when soldiers and seamen brought with them musical influences from the Peninsula that meshed with African and indigenous rhythms in the Caribbean island. Upon their return to Spain, these Spaniards took with them a new musical genre created from this confluence known as *cantes de ida y vuelta*—quickly popularized in Spain—

¹² In previous chapters I have argued that Cubans have a special place in Spanish society. While they are immigrants and are subject to discourses similar to those that other Latin American immigrants face, they are held in higher esteem and are perceived to be more akin to Spaniards. This is a trace of the imperial nostalgia framework that shapes the thesis. Being special has resulted in Cubans being what I term a spectacular minority, that is, the minority that is portrayed popularly as one whose main function and mode of societal integration is through spectacles- the subject of jokes, the caricaturesque figure, and the needy subject whose humor and exotic charm carries him/her through the migratory process.

¹³ *Suavecito* Sexteto Nacional, *Sones Cubanos*, Vol. 1 2003.

whose origin was sometimes difficult to determine.¹⁴ This instability of origin characterizes Orishas's hip hop, making it a type of music with trans-Atlantic traits—the *there* of Cuba expressed in the *here* of Europe—that maintains the legacy established by these *cantes*.

After the *cantes*, the first Cuban musical genre to officially circulate outside the island was the Habanera. This was a genre that developed at the end of the 18th century as a result of the immigration of French colonists to Cuba after the Haitian Revolution of 1791. The Habanera blends African rhythmic elements with the French *contredanse* to produce a *contradanza habanera*. It is interesting to note that from its inception, Cuban music was trans-Atlantically linked to Spain through the industry of cultural production as the Habanera titled “La paloma” or “The Dove”—the first bestseller of Cuban music—was written by the Basque songwriter Sebastián Yradier.¹⁵ By 1840 *la danza habanera* as this genre came to be known in Spain had become a popular Spanish genre. Musical historian Cristóbal Díaz Ayala points out that since then, Cuba began to leave an indelible musical print not only in Spain but around the globe. He says,

Tal era la fuerza mágica, la atracción de La Habana, que bastaba mencionar habanera... Cuba había creado la que hoy llamamos una marca comercial. A diferencia de otros productos comerciales que necesitan en gentilicio, tabaco, azúcar o café cubano, a este producto musical le bastaba con eso: ser habanera.¹⁶

¹⁴ *Ida y vuelta* literally means going and coming and describes a roundtrip condition of arriving and returning to and from a place of origin.

¹⁵ Cristóbal Díaz Ayala. *Música cubana del areyto al rap cubano*. (San Juan: Fundación Musicalia, 2003) 20.

¹⁶ *Ibid* 20.

Thus, through its imagined capital city, Cuba began to gain symbolic capital. As a locus of enunciation, Havana's charm and its condition as a fountain of inspiration, is one readily cited in Orishas's lyrics. In the song "Represent" for example, members say they funky style comes from there, they mention that everyone in Havana dances to their music and one rapper affirms that when he seeks inspiration or wants to release some lyrics he does so in his zone—Havana.¹⁷ Given this Havana-centric representation in this song, it is no surprise that "Represent" was the most popular track in the album *A lo cubano*, serving as the theme song for *Dirty Dancing: Havana Nights*, the sequel to the 1980s American film *Dirty Dancing*.

In the 19th century, Cuba began to export musicians to Europe, mostly mulattos and Afro-Cubans because as Díaz Ayala points out, musicians were not well paid and most of them belonged to the lower economic classes of the island.¹⁸ The type of racial mixing evident in the social makeup of artists translated to the music they produced as artists created rhythms that brought Afro-Cuban and European sounds together. It was in this century that Cuban music began to create a nationalist sentiment thanks to Manuel Saumell. A French composer, Saumell attempted, ill-fatedly, to produce the first Cuban national opera basing it on a Cuban theme and developing it according to an Italian opera model. Nonetheless, Cuban writer and cultural critic Alejo Carpentier describes him as the father of nationalist tendency in Cuban music because his music aimed at highlighting Cuba's hybrid identity. According to Carpentier,

¹⁷ Orishas, "Represent," *A lo cubano*, rec. 1999 (EMI France).

¹⁸ Cristobal Díaz Ayala. *Música cubana del areyto al rap*. Ediciones Universal: 1993, 23.

Thanks to him, the constituent elements of a “Cubanness”... became a musical fact and an event filled with implications. Saumell’s work, by drawing a line of demarcation, allowed elements of popular culture to nourish a conscientious musical speculation. It was a passage from mere rhythmic instinct to the consciousness of a style. The idea of nationalism had been born.¹⁹

With the concept of musical nationalism established in 19th century, the following century set out to demonstrate the extent to which Cuba has achieved modernity. Declared a republic in 1902, the Caribbean island turned its gaze to France as the model par excellence of universal culture.²⁰ Since then, France has come to symbolize an alternative space for transculturation for the projection of Cuban culture, as evidenced by the case of Orishas. Their first musical production was recorded there and one of their three members has resided in Paris for over a decade. The members of Orishas are following the footsteps of the famous Rita la Única de Cuba—the moniker given to singer Rita Montaner—who was among the first Cuban artists recording in Paris during the 1930s alongside Moisés Simons, pianist and composer of the Cuban classic, “El manisero.”²¹

While Rita Montaner dazzled audiences in France, the Cuban *son* was debuting across Spain. When the cultural exhibit called Exposición Iberoamericana de Sevilla took place in 1929, Cuba’s band El Septeto Nacional introduced Spanish audiences to the most representative musical genre of the island and to date the most representative of Cuban culture—the *son*. Their song “Suavecito” was a success subsequently making this type of

¹⁹ Alejo Carpentier. *Music in Cuba* (ed. Timothy Brennan, trans. Alan West-Durán) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001) 193.

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Díaz Ayala 37.

music the most preferred foreign music for import among Spaniards. For the Septeto this journey to Spain resulted in the recording of six songs for the Madrid based label Gramófono.²² Seven decades later, Orishas would record songs from their musical productions *A lo cubano* (1999), *Emigrante* (2002), and *El Kilo* (2005) for the Madrid record label EMI Spain. Following the *son* fever, rumba was the genre of vogue that reached Spain via artists such as Don Justo Azpiazu. Later Ernesto Lecuona—the renowned pianist and composer of *La malagueña*—settled in Spain in 1932 and created the Lecuona Cuban Boys Orchestra.

Although the Spanish Civil War and the Franco era weakened the musical ties between Spain and Cuba, in the likes of political and economic ties, musical ties were never completely severed. With the onset of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, various restrictions were imposed on the music industry that diminished the contact Cuban artists had with foreign audiences. However, groups such as La Orquesta Aragón did keep Spanish and French audiences dancing cha-cha-chá from the 1940s onward. During the 1970s and 1980s, the Cuban *Nueva Trova* genre or *canción protesta*—a genre that denounces social and political conditions on the island and abroad—and its most recognized artists Pablo Milanés and Silvio Rodríguez, captivated Spanish audiences. Much can be said about the historic climate of Spain in the post 1970s Franco era that made this genre so popular among Spanish youth in the likes of Pilar Zumel, mentioned in chapter 2. Besides the artists who make up the group Orishas, the 1990s and the new millennium has seen the birth of a third generation of *nuevos troveros* or *troveros nouveaux* who have followed in the footsteps of Milanés and Rodríguez such as Habana

²² Díaz Ayala 43.

Abierta, Gema y Pável and Lucrecia who have begun their careers in Madrid or Barcelona.²³



Figure 3.1 Pável Urquiza's solo performance in Madrid's La Cueva del Bolero

Despite the presence of Cuban music in Spain throughout the last two centuries, Díaz-Ayala argues that the strong presence of Cuban music at the beginning of the twentieth century was something Spain longed for once again and it is returning with immense power (55). Certainly, the international recording industry has zoned in on Cuba's musical potency in the 1990s as a result of the Special Period that has only facilitated Spanish investment in Cuban artists. The fall of the Soviet Bloc has forced laws related to Cuban artists traveling outside the island to be relaxed and Cuban music has become more marketed and commercialized around the globe, especially in Europe. The outcome has been a proliferation of Cuban artists in both Spain and France—such as that of Orishas—that began in 1996 with Ry Cooder's Buena Vista Social Club venture.

²³ Arsenio Rodríguez. "Consolidación de la diáspora. Los músicos cubanos de fuera de la Isla: andaduras y escaramuzas de su inserción en el mercado y la vida cultural." *Diario Independiente de Asuntos Cubanos* (Barcelona, 13 septiembre de 2004).

A project that brought together an older generation of Cuban artists from the 1930s and 1940s, the Buena Vista Social Club reunited *trovadores* like Compay Segundo and Ibrahim Ferrer, in a documentary and soundtrack that in many ways led to the re-birth of international interest in Cuban music. Having received the Grammy award in 1997, Buena Vista was widely acclaimed in both Spain and France, and their story and their music has added to the symbolic capital of Cuban music and paved the way for groups like Orishas who a year later received the Grammy award for representing the newest wave of Cuban music—Cuban hip hop.

Orishas in the Mix: Constructing Afro-Cuban Identity

*El que no tiene de congo
tiene de carabalí...*²⁴

During the critical decade as the years between 1920 and 1935 were known in Cuba, the value of the island's African heritage was officially recognized for the first time thanks to the *negrismo* or *afrocubanismo* movement. Led by white Cuban intellectuals, among them Alejo Carpentier, the movement aimed to document the importance of black culture and the black demographic for Cuban national identity.²⁵ Akin to New York's Harlem Renaissance of the same era, *afrocubanismo* promoted Afro-Cuban art, literature and music. Exposed to international artistic trends of the times that exalted cultural expressions of marginalized groups or the 'other,' Cuban intellectuals helped construct a Cuban identity inclusive of that 'other': Afro-Cubans and their cultural forms. As Robin

²⁴ Robin D. Moore. Song "Viejo Lázaro" in *Nationalizing Blackness: Afrocubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920-1940*. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997) 226.

²⁵ Carpentier, Introduction 4.

Moore explains, the need for Carpentier and other intellectuals to re-invent Cuba collectively, to negotiate a bi-polar (black/white) society, was born of the racial antagonism that existed in Cuba during the 1910s through the 1930s, with the Cuban Race War of 1912 as perhaps the most prominent example of said conflict. In *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912*, Aline Helg tells how after the wars for independence (1895-1898), in which Afro-Cubans fought en masse, they demanded political change by forming the first national black party in the Western Hemisphere. They felt they had earned the rewards of a free society, having spared 86,000 lives in the battle and the very idea of self-government implied a free, integrated society with equal rights as promised by patriots José Martí and Antonio Maceo. This challenge met with strong opposition from the white Cuban elite, culminating in the massacre of thousands of Afro-Cubans in 1912 in the Race War that Helg describes as “an outburst of white racism against Afro-Cubans.”²⁶ The event effectively ended Afro-Cubans' political organization along racial lines. Helg stresses that although some cultural elements of African origin were integrated into official Cuban culture, true racial equality has remained elusive. In order to confront and resolve this societal conflict, a unifying racial ideology was necessary to balance the racial extremes within Cuba, leading to a Cuban nation imagined as mulatta or biracial that placed emphasis on the Afro-Cuban element of Cuban culture.²⁷ The fact that the musical genres of *el son*, *la guaracha*, *la conga*, and *la rumba*—Cuban rhythms of African inspiration—come to represent Cuban national music affirms the nationalization of Afro-Cuban identity.

²⁶ Aline Helg. *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press) 232.

²⁷ Moore 220-21.

The ways in which Carpentier and his contemporaries imagined the Cuban nation—to use Anderson’s terminology—continues to be the point of reference for defining Cuban culture in present times. The racial identifications that intellectuals of the critical decade delineated are conserved in the construction of a unifying Afro-Cuban identity in Castro’s Cuba. In *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality and Politics in Twentieth Century*, Alejandro de la Fuente describes the prevalence of the imagery of the African in island culture and as a result of post-revolutionary Cuba’s identification with the independence struggles taking place in Africa, the anti-apartheid movement, and the civil rights movements of African Americans in the United States.²⁸ Thus, Castro’s Cuba reverts to an appropriation of the Negristo movement and its cultural expressions in order to reconstruct a national identity based on Afro-Cuban roots. The famed 1930s charanga band, La Orquesta Aragón, serves as an example of this return to the seed. The 1970s marked their decade as ambassadors of Cuban music on the African continent, intent on re-establishing cultural ties on the basis of *lo negro*. As a result, Cuban music was taken up as a national form of music in Senegal and Aragón has recorded various songs in African dialects, the most famous of which is “Yaye Boy,” a song originally sung by the African charanga group Africando.

If under the Machado dictatorship (1924-1933) the rumba genre represented marginalized Afro-Cuban culture internationally, in the 1990s Cuban hip hop took the rumba’s place on the international circuit.²⁹ Sujatha Fernandes explains that since 1991,

²⁸ Alejandro De la Fuente. *A Nation For All: Race, Inequality and Politics in Twentieth Century Cuba*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press) 307.

²⁹ Moore 167. Moore goes on to describe how Afro-Cuban sounds later became de-marginalized, considered essential to the expression of Cuban nationalism.

when the Soviet Bloc dismantled and the Special Period began in Cuba, Cuban hip hop has become a legitimized national expression of blackness among Cuban youth. In a historic parallel, the same specters of economic crisis and political instability that caused racial antagonism under the Machado dictatorship resurfaced during Special Period Cuba. If in the early twentieth century black Cubans had suffered the ills of racial discriminatory practices and found a lack of political outlets through which to fight against these practices, the last decade of the twentieth century proved strikingly similar. As Fernandes confirms, the effects of prejudice, inequality, and falling victims to stereotypes, “Reemerge in ways that promote racial conflict and restrict the options open to blacks for work and advancement.”³⁰

It seemed contradictory that a revolutionary project openly committed to social equality experience such internal conflict, especially in light of the numerous campaigns initiated during the early years of the Revolution to eradicate racism. However, as De la Fuente points out, beginning in 1962 debates about race and racism were silenced. Such topics along with the newly egalitarian state of Cuba were only addressed within public political discourse lauding the triumphs of the Revolution. It was understood that the Revolution had resolved the pending issue of institutionalized discrimination and thus speaking about race was deemed an unpatriotic act.³¹ Hence, if Cuban society already suffered the maladies of unspoken and unresolved discrimination, the heightened inequality that ensued during the Special Period added fuel to an ardently burning fire. Under these conditions, the 1990s saw a targeted resurgence of Afro-Cuban *santería* as a

³⁰ Sujatha Fernandes. *Cuba: Represent!* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

³¹ De la Fuente 266.

popularized form of identification with Afro-Cuban roots that contested anti-black sentiment. It was hip hop however which marked a firmer protest against racial inequality in Cuba. Afro-Cuban youths who identified as *underground* rappers used this musical genre “[a]s a means of cultural contestation in a period of increasing racial inequalities and declining opportunities for black youth.”³² It was within that racialized socio-economic environment that the young mulatto founders of the group Amenaza, renamed Orishas in the late 1990s, began a musical revolution of their own on the island.

Hip hop, as an expression of Afro-Cubanness, encountered governmental hesitance and ambivalence in ways similar to those that emerged during the *Negrismo* years. As Moore has noted, the Africanism expressed in music such as the rumba in the 30s and six decades later in hip hop,

...Served as simultaneous sources of pride and embarrassment to the nation. They were both powerful icons to rally behind *and* markers of degeneracy, reminders of a cultural legacy most considered shameful.³³

A musical genre born of the need to voice a prevalent discrimination in Cuban society, hip hop threatened to dismantle a unifying national discourse about racial and socio-economic equality. It also represented an urban revolution with traces of Americanness, given that the genre was born in the streets of New York as an expression of African-American and Puerto Rican youths’ discontent with the inequalities they experienced there.³⁴ Given the Cuban government’s staunchly anti-American, anti-capitalist sentiment, hip hop’s roots, and its dangerous contestation of a unifying myth about racial

³² Ibid

³³ Moore 220.

³⁴ Raquel Z. Rivera. *New York Ricans From the Hip Hop Zone*. (New York: Palgrave, 2003) 6.

equality, the limited production of hip hop was strictly underground. The Cuban government could not and would not openly support this artistic expression perceived to be anti-Cuban. Nonetheless, as Fernandes explains, “Forms of Afro-Cuban cultural expressions have historically been appropriated by the state as a way of fostering national cohesiveness, particularly during times of crisis and transformation.”³⁵ Eventually the Cuban government appropriated this sequel to the *Negrismo* movement to gain public favor and in 1995, four years after the Special Period had begun, the Festival Nacional de Rap Cubano became an annual government-sponsored event which by 2002 had reached international status under the watchful eye of the Cuban Rap Agency. Said government-sponsored agency’s creation marked the acceptance of hip hop as a cultural form, furnishing artists a record label through which to record their music and a magazine—*Movimiento*—that increased awareness about the genre, and working to facilitate the exchange between Cuban rappers and African-American rappers invited to perform at the yearly festival.³⁶

Although Orishas acquired fame in Cuba and has been invited on several occasions to partake in the Cuban Rap Festival, their success has stirred certain uneasiness among Afro-Cuban youth. While some Cuban rappers hope to attain their status in the musical world—as expressed by various artists in the documentary *Hip Hop Cuban All-Stars Volume 1*—others view them as sell-outs. The latter’s animosity stems from a perceived treason to the *underground* Cuban socio-political project, selling their

³⁵ Sujatha Fernandes. “Fear of a Black Nation: Local Rappers, Transnational Crossings, and State Power in Contemporary Cuba.” *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 12 (2003) 595.

³⁶ Kim Millbauer. “Mass Appeal Exploring Cuban Hip Hop.” *Seattle Weekly*, October 29, 2003, 33.

work and by extension themselves to a global market of cultural production. Fernandes explains that *underground* or *socially conscious* rappers interpret Orishas music as a product of commercialization that allows foreign record labels, here those based in Spain, to profit from the selling of a stereotyped Otherness, albeit *la mulata*, *el tabaco* or *el ron*—of all things Cuban. At the government level, Orishas has not been censored or hindered despite some lyrics that allude to their discontent with the Revolution’s project. On the contrary, they benefit from a trans-Atlantic to and fro without political repercussions, being amongst the first Cuban groups signed in Europe allowed to return with relative ease to the island. Following Bourdieu, we can say that the symbolic capital that Orishas has acquired since they left Cuba at the end of the 90s has been appropriated by the Cuban government with the objective of exploiting their Afro-centric identity to promote the image of an island that identifies as Afro-Cuban. As Fernandes has stated, “The Cuban state realizes that it can harness the energy of these rappers as a way of bolstering the image of Cuba as a mixed race nation with African roots.”³⁷ Therefore, Cuba’s nationalist project relies on music such as that produced by Orishas—as Machado’s government relied on the rumba genre to reconstruct national unity under the flag of Afro-Cubanism. Although Orishas has been able to revolutionize the musical world with its Afro-centric expression, it has been able to do so from a trans-Atlantic positioning that is more than geographic.

Rapping About the Cuban Diasporic Experience

³⁷ Fernandes 583.

The militant racial identity that is seen in their new artistic name, their lyrics, and in the rap genre all contribute to the selling of Orishas as “the Other,” thus perpetuating the trend of exoticizing Cuban culture.³⁸ The lyrical analysis sheds light on the migratory experience of the “Othered” subject. While these artists are aware of the singularity of their migratory experience—it is conditioned by their art—they are nonetheless subject to racial intolerance in their daily living as immigrants. This experience is narrated in their musical lyrics which shift in their first production from singing about ‘being Cuban’ to ‘being Cuban immigrants in Spain.’

Orishas: Trans-Atlantically Rapping

*Otro continente fue el que nos reveló
Ahora represento a Cuba
Rumba, rap y mi lindo guaguancó.*³⁹

In an appropriation of Paul Gilroy’s concept of “The Black Atlantic,” Joseba Gabilondo proposes that the “The Hispanic Atlantic” be considered a structural position from which to re-contextualize the global aspects of the post-colonial and of post-nationalism in Spain as well as Latin America.⁴⁰ This provides a starting point for evaluating cultural production on either side of the Atlantic and incites an analysis of

³⁸ Orishas was originally named Anónimo Consejo (Anonymous Advice) and once they began to record in Spain they changed their name to Orishas. Orishas is the name of the pantheon of Afro-Cuban deities in the Santería religion that has come to dominate Cuba’s religious belief system.

³⁹ Orishas, “300 Kilos,” rec. France 2002, *Emigrante*, EMI France.

⁴⁰ Joseba Gabilondo. “The Hispanic Atlantic.” *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* 5 (2001), 7.

such production from a trans-Atlantic perspective. For the purposes of this dissertation, trans-Atlantic will refer to an unstable point of origin, an oscillatory movement that in each act of the journey—departing or returning—articulates and later de-articulates the starting point of said journey. It is, in reference to the image that De Certeau creates in “A Walk in the City,” the practice of walking, of constructing one’s own map in the act of walking that requires leaving points along the path behind with every step taken; it is the absence of a stable place, the lack of place. Parting from this undefined and transitory zone, I propose to analyze the (trans)portation of Cuban hip hop to Spanish soil through a trans-Atlantic reading of Orishas’s music. Employing Bourdieu’s theoretical framework on cultural production, I delve into the post-colonial ramifications of this trans-Atlantic journey for transculturation and the construction of a Cuban diasporic nationalism.

Antonio Méndez-Rubio has argued that in the context of contemporary globalization, Spanish culture has been affected by two prominent forces: one in which cultural practices from diverse region in the Peninsula have entered into dialogue with one another, and the other a force that inscribes communicative manifestations with different understandings of social class in Spain.⁴¹ Hip hop as a musical genre serves as an example of how the former fuses with the latter in new spaces where Spanish national identity is critically questioned and in question. This genre becomes all the more important for the construction and definition of Spanish national identity when the most popular form of hip hop consumed in Spain is not that produced by native artists but rather by foreigners. Orishas is at the top of the list, the first rap group to go gold for their

⁴¹ Antonio Méndez- Rubio. “Cultura en Conflicto: El caso de la música hip hop,” *Sociedad Ibérica de Etnomusicología* (Universitat de Valencia, 2004) 231.

sales in Spain. This success is inextricably related to immigration when it is taken into consideration, as Jaume Martí-Olivella does, that it is one of the most important factors in the re-configuration of a national identity.⁴² It must be highlighted that Spain, during the years of *La transición*—a model of democracy, cultural postmodernity and a viable economic presence in Latin America during the 1980s and the 1990s—was a migratory magnet. According to Silvia Bermúdez, with Spain’s globalization in 1992 as a result of Olympic games celebrated in Barcelona, the country became a promised land for African and Caribbean immigrants—Cubans and Dominicans in large numbers—giving a black face to Spain’s immigrant populace.⁴³



Figure 3.2 Orishas’ “A lo cubano” (1999) CD Cover

More than just a racialized face, Orishas offers Spain’s musical circuits a cultural expression that far from being Ibero-centric, is an affirmation of the Afro-Cuban roots

⁴² Jaume Martí-Olivella. “Cuba and Spanish Cinema’s Transatlantic Gaze,” *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies*, sp. ed.: *The Hispanic Atlantic* 5 (2001), 163.

⁴³ Silvia Bermúdez. “Rocking the Boat: The Black Atlantic in Spanish Pop Music from the 1980s and the 1990s,” *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies*, sp. ed.: *The Hispanic Atlantic* 5 (2001), 177.

with which the members of the group identify. Their name is the first marker of this identification. Orishas is the name given to the pantheon of deities venerated in the Yoruba religion called *santería* or Regla de Ocha— an unmistakable appropriation of the Afro-Cuban. On the cover of their first production, entitled *A lo cubano* (1999), the mulatto faces of the then four members of the group are pictured in poses similar to those of an African tribe, complete with war paint and tribal scars accentuated on their faces. On the inner cover, each member is individually photographed with multi-colored religious beads around their necks, warriors who sport the protection of their Afro-Cuban *santos* or *orishas* in this war to voice their racialized Cuban identity. Each is grateful to these deities for their unaltered luck and success—*aché, los caminos abiertos*— expressed in captions such as: “*Pa’ mi santo las manos de oro de Eleguá, bendición y Bendita tú Changó.*” The appreciation extends to the opening sounds of the album, after which it was named, in a *toque* or song dedicated to the deities that is accompanied by traditional drumming and chants in the Yoruba language. In addition to thanking the deities for facilitating the musical production and by extension their migration from Cuba to Spain, Orishas also asks for continued success and personal involvement in representing them, their Afro-Cuban ancestry and their music, “*progreso y desenvolvimiento personal.*” The introductory *toque* culminated with the enunciation of “*Orisha, aché*” (force of life, good luck) and the first song of the album “Represent” seems to begin as a direct result of the workings of the Orisha deities. These young rappers, who have been blessed with this *aché*, are now representing (for) their respective deities and their ancestry through their music, as the following enumerative lyric from the song “Represent” shows: “*Hey bro Eleguá, Changó, Obatalá, Yemayá, Ochún,*

Maferefun orula y que mi canto suba pa' la gente de mi Cuba, mis ancestros todos mis muertos todo eso represento—Cuba."⁴⁴

Homeland aside, the lyrics of the song "Represent" speaks for or represents various approximations to the trans-Atlantic production of *A lo cubano*. Along with the English title, the bilingual chorus, "*Represent... Cuba, Orishas underground de la Habana*" speaks to the glocalization, the local appropriation of the English language and therefore the American influence in this musical genre, born on the streets of New York City and Cubanized by Orishas in Europe.⁴⁵ As Cuban hip hop producer Ariel Fernández explains, the term *underground* is a weighty one when speaking about the genre, as it serves to distinguish them from commercialized artists. He enumerates two qualifiers to distinguish the artists committed to an *underground* production:

First, they maintain an orthodox and radical stance along the lines of the origins of the genre and they distance themselves from whatever possibilities of fusion for commercialization. Second, they focus much more on the integration of politically committed lyrics with the social context. Commercial groups are those who incorporate popular Cuban rhythms in order to be more accepted, achieve authenticity, and become commercially viable.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Orishas, "Represent," *A lo cubano*, rec. 1999 (EMI France).

⁴⁵ Glocalization is a melding of the terms "global" and "local," and implies meeting of the growing global arena with localized, everyday life. Glocalization's goal is to ensure a globalized world is a stable and integrated place, while also protecting the cultural heritage of local areas. It is a term often used when speaking of music with genres such as hip hop. The global phenomenon of the hip hop takes on local meanings, values and styles when it is locally produced. In the case of a locally made hip hop like that of Orishas, it incorporates global elements of the hip hop culture but in making it markedly Cuban through language, themes, and lyrical messages related to their immigrant experience it is a glocal production.

⁴⁶ Ariel Fernández. "¿Poesía urbana? O la Nueva Trova de los Noventa." *El Caimán Barbudo* 296: 10.

It is contradictory for Orishas, who use their song “Represent” to confess that their sound is one of fusion, fusing the traditional Cuban rhythms of rumba, son and guaguancó with rap, to say that they would consider themselves *underground*. Likewise, their commercialization cannot be contested as their music is heard globally and they have a Latin Grammy for their 2003 production *Emigrante* as palpable proof. It seems that as trans-Atlantic subjects, these artists destabilize the meaning of their hip hop, indentifying it with the transitory nature of their own life—living between European cities and traveling to Cuba. Through the concept of habitus, Bourdieu argues that the individual is never the originator of his/her practices but rather that there exists a causal relation between the cognitive resources of the individual and his/her surrounding social environment in which thought and action take place. Given that Orishas sing from outside of Cuba but they identify with Cuba from within as spokesmen of an Afro-Cuban island culture, their affiliation with *underground* rap, *rap conciente*, can be read as an oscillatory resource that transgresses the nation-state and attempts to create a unifying resonance on the other side of the Atlantic. In this way, their music is able to evade the defining essentialisms that articulate and de-articulate that which is *underground* and that which is commercialized. Orishas’s hip hop is ambivalently *underground* in that it demonstrates loyalty to the place of origin, the social environment of which it is a product yet it lacks a commitment to the social topics that are at the forefront of other rap group’s agendas—socio-political critique and denouncing the ills of racism. This could be read as a trans-Atlantic strategy in light of which the song “Represent” reveals another meaning of the album’s *A lo cubano* title. The need to claim a neutral zone, a gray zone synonymous with the trans-Atlantic, comes through in an attempt to navigate the in-

between spaces instead of settling on one place of origin or point of departure. In this sense, Orishas can be considered what Hermano Vianna, author of *The Mystery of Samba*, has called transcultural mediators. The artists and their music's function is "to shuttle back and forth among social groups, putting them in contact with one another, constantly redefining the boundaries between them and remodeling the patterns of their collective life."⁴⁷ Orishas's trans-Atlantic musical journey bridges both the Cuban and Spaniard cultures and incites a redefinition of the parameters of both cultures within a trans-Atlantic framework.

Bourdieu's Capitals

*...Con un estilo rumbero
hay que quitarse el sombrero
frente a mi habito a hip hop.*⁴⁸

"La música cubana vale mucho chico." These words said by one of Orishas's original producers, Miko Niko, became a central quote in "Represent." With over twenty autochthonous musical genres, Cuba's extensive musical legacy is undeniable and one which has been appropriated globally. From the cinquillo rhythm, foundational to the habanera that serves as base for the Argentine tango to the nationalization of the charanga and the cha-cha-chá in Senegal, the prestige awarded Cuban music is indicative of what

⁴⁷ Hermano Vianna, *The Mystery of Samba*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999) Introduction.

⁴⁸ Orishas, "A lo cubano," *A lo cubano* rec. 1999 (EMI France).

Bourdieu calls symbolic capital. Orishas recognizes, through their lyrics, that their niche in the musical sphere was carved by the rich tradition that antecedes them:

*Recordando los tiempos de antaño
Solo puedo quitarme el sombrero
Lo que tengo en musicalidad viene de lejos
No es robado, ni copiado es más
Es heredero, es otra edad.*⁴⁹

Representative of a new chapter of Cuba's trans-Atlantic musical history, Orishas's hip hop is a cultural production that aims at representing a particular kind of patriotism, a nationalism of those colonized within the parameters of the colonizer's space in post-colonial times that is directly relational to cultural and economic capitals.

In order for a Cuban national consciousness to be articulated within Spain via the rap genre, it is necessary to return to Anderson's notion of a community or nation distinguishing itself by the ways in which it imagines itself. Imagining the nation is imagining a common history, it is locating ethnic roots and it is a process that requires what Richard Peterson calls the fabrication of authenticity.⁵⁰ In the Cuban case, fabricating this authenticity would result in a doubly trans-Atlantic journey because all things Cuban are a fusion of both Spanish and African elements. In fact, regardless of the genre, Cuban music is the product of the transculturation of which Fernando Ortiz spoke, defining the term as an even exchange of giving and receiving cultural elements from which a new cultural reality is born. Not a collage or a mosaic, transculturation refers to a new phenomenon that is original and independent from its components. Ortiz named this

⁴⁹ Orishas, "El kilo," *El kilo* rec. 2005 (EMI Spain).

⁵⁰ Richard Peterson, as quoted in Hermano Vianna, *The Mystery of Samba*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999) 35.

process (metaphorically) an *ajiaco* or Cuban stew in which each ingredient contributes to the final product to describe this process. What this process suggests is a musical *antropogafia* of the musical rhythms from Spain and those from Africa to produce Cuban music. The same process takes place when the rhythms of African-American rap are globalized in order to transculturize them or Cubanize them with the Orisha sound.

With this said, if Cuba and its culture are imagined as the end product of a harmonious syncretism, the presence of Orishas's hip hop on the Spanish musical scene can be interpreted as an intent of rescuing or re-claiming that which is Spain's by consumption of that which is sold as foreign or Othered. By consuming a musical product that is Cuban by transculturation Spaniards are allowed to recover part of their own cultural identity—that which through colonization has become Cuban in a similar fashion to that which occurs in the United States with the consumption of Puerto Rican music. As Frances Negrón-Muntaner argues in her book *Boricua Pop*, Puerto Ricans are American ethnic subjects who have imagined themselves and been imagined as national subjects through culture, including musical culture in the likes of Ricky Martin and Jennifer López, for historical, symbolic and political reasons.⁵¹ Cubans who share a similar history of colonialism with Spain and recreate those models in a post-colonial Special Period era, they too are imagined as national Hispano ethnic subjects. Recognizing this mirror image goes hand in hand with cultural capital because Spain's conquering history must be known in order to recognize oneself and the nation in that history. Although Orishas clearly identifies with an Afro-centric identity, elements of an Ibero-centric identity surface in the mixing of traditional musical sounds such as *son* and *charanga*.

⁵¹ Frances Negrón-Muntaner. *Boricua Pop*. (New York: NYU Press, 2004) 4.

Despite the evident trend—colonized now colonizes the colonizer with their symbolic capital—the fact that the colonizer validates Orishas’s musical expression, making it a trans-Atlantic success with ample markets for consumption, only speaks to a re-colonization of the Cuban sound by Spain. Clearly, Spanish cultural capital is a foundational factor in generating the economic capital from which Orishas benefits. Simultaneously, it highlights a trans-Atlantic condition in cultural capitals as they refer to Cuba and to all things Cuban, while reverting to the instability of origin because the parameters of Spanish influence in this transculturated sounds is not distinguishable.

Trans-porting Their Cuban Aché: Orishas Trans-Atlantic

Flotando *ando*
pasando *la mano,* “*mano*”
 sobre el *mapa* *de* *este mundo...*⁵²

From his trans-Atlantic positioning, based in Paris, Carpentier contributed to the formation of an Afro-Cuban nationalism. Through his writing, he was able to re-inscribe the marginalized African cultural element into Cuba’s national imaginary, thus challenging the island’s musical legacy to reflect on its African roots. The members of Orishas, based in both Spain and France at the group’s inception but producing exclusively in Madrid, took to that challenge of years past through their Afro-Cuban rap music. From the group’s name to their lyrics and the images that represent them in their

⁵²Orishas, “C.U.B.A. 537,” *A lo cubano*, 1999 (EMI France)

productions *A lo cubano* (1999), *Emigrante* (2002) and *El Kilo* (2005), Orishas confirms a Cuban identity that is firmly rooted in Afro-Cubanism. Nonetheless, I argue that the place of origin that they pretend to evoke in their music exists solely a geographic point—Cuba, Caribbean island, Havana, capital city. The music these artists produce therefore reflects a lack of place, trans-Atlantic in nature that like the *cante de vaivén*, expresses the oscillatory condition of being Cuban and producing a Cuban art outside of Cuba.

In their first musical production, *A lo cubano*, Orishas dedicates a nostalgic song about their roots to a seemingly changing and forgetful world. The topics of their songs are latent with a need for remembering the Afro-Cuban cultural element by honoring their ancestors and the musical legacy they have left behind as a testament to Cuban cultural identity. The song “Represent” in particular, speaks to those cultural elements that the rappers represent, highlighting first and foremost that their own music is a product of a rich musical history:

*Ven que te quiero cantar de corazón así
La historia de mis raíces
Rumba son y guaguancó todo mezclado
Pa que lo bailes tu
Mira ¿hay quién no baile en la Habana?
...Represento mis ancestros toa' la mezcla*

To “represent” within hip hop music and its culture is, according to Christopher Holmes-Smith, “To become a walking signifier, the self-embodiment of one’s value system as answers to *What do you stand for? Where do you come from? With whom do you choose*

to associate?”⁵³ Thus, in this musical genre, the urban spaces where these signifying practices originate—as Murray Forman has pointed out—serve as a continuum from inner-city to ghetto, to the hood, and are spiritual homes for rap artists.⁵⁴ The genres named are what the members of Orishas represent—the African influence in Cuban music that in this 1999 musical production are mixed to continue the musical genealogy of which they form the latest generation. The word “mix” is of prime importance in this historicizing project because by nature to mix means to fuse various components, losing the origin of said components. If Orishas’s project is to represent that which is Cuban, in itself a multi-layered mix of the indigenous, the African and the European, it proposes an identification with a trans-Atlantic heritage whose articulation is also trans-Atlantic. Although the lyrics of this song admit to representing the black as much as the white cultural element, it is not vocalized by any of the group’s members but rather by a French rapper who sings, “*J’représente le blanc, le noir, D’chicago à Panama, Tokyo à la Havana J’représente la fiesta soul de Cuba y mi conga.*”⁵⁵ This linguistic change signals what Jossianna Arroyo calls an act of cultural transvestism used as much to reveal as to hide varying aspects of identity. Likewise, in the song “A lo cubano” one of the rappers admits to a certain level of censorship in their music, “*Con mi conexión controlando bien mi lengua... quiero que lo entiendas.*” If in the former song, the transvestism hides the European cultural facet, there is a second and more palpable transvestism throughout the

⁵³ Christopher Holmes-Smith, “Method in the Madness: Exploring the Boundaries of Identity in Hip Hop Performativity,” *Social Identities*, Volume 3 Number 3, 1997, 345.

⁵⁴ Murray Forman. *The Hood Comes First: Race, Space and Place in Rap and Hip Hop*. (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press: 2002), 46.

⁵⁵ Orishas, “Represent.” Trans: “I represent the white, the black, from Chicago to Panama, Tokyo to Havana.”

production, that of the colloquial Cuban language, which serves to reveal the Afro-Cuban cultural element. As Arroyo argues, in cultural narratives—here the lyrics of Orishas’s songs—the Afro-Cuban rappers use a Creole language with which they wish to represent their nationalism.⁵⁶ The Cuban street jargon which is heard throughout *A lo cubano*—*asere, mano, punto, ¿Qué bolá?, ratrillar*—originate in a popular street culture that ultimately is associated with and representative of an Afro-Cuban *chusmería* or low-class form of behavior/speech.⁵⁷ Coupled with the use of phrases uttered in African dialects associated with *santería*, Orishas reaffirms its proximity to Afro-Cuban culture and their aim at offering and representing it as a nationalist cultural expression. These linguistic transitions also attest to the oscillatory state between various identities that relegate all things Cuban to gray zone devoid of origin.

Throughout the album, the references to journeys symbolic of the circular migration that constantly influences Orishas’s music are countless. Similar to the chorus of “Represent” already discussed, the songs “A lo cubano” (1999) and “Orishas Llegó” (2002) speak about the transporting of Orishas’s hip hop sound from Europe to other parts of the world, the Cuban capital included: “*A to mi familia, to’s con el hip hop, to París a La Habana, Orishas llegó.*”⁵⁸ Although these sons of Elegúa sing their nationalist note from abroad, they assure their audience that their sound is nothing but Cuban, despite being produced abroad,

⁵⁶ Jossianna Arroyo. *Travestismos culturales: Literatura y Etnografía en Cuba y Brasil*. (Pittsburgh: Nuevo Siglo, 2003) 28.

⁵⁷ *Asere/mano* means friend, *punto* is a pimp or place for selling drugs, *¿qué bolá?* refers to an informal and comical greeting used often amongst Cubans that translates to “What’s up?” and *rastrillar* refers to hurting someone physically.

⁵⁸ Orishas “Orishas llegó,” *A lo cubano*.

*No, no, no a lo cubano
 Directamente de Paname
 De París para ser exacto
 De Cheguan, donde están
 Los de la nueva generación...*⁵⁹

Although this new generation of hip hop artists indeed contributes to a legacy of Cuban music far from home, it is still home, in the heart of Havana that provides the source of inspiration: “*Cuando quiero estallar yo me voy a mi zona, pa' la Habana yo me voy.*”⁶⁰ Here, the metaphoric journey emphasizes the trans-Atlantic to and fro that characterizes the Cubanness that Orishas proclaims. These musical transportations reaffirm Orishas position as transcultural mediators who produce and perform a memory of Havana and its music, Havana and its Afro-Cuban roots, for audiences worldwide from their physical location in Spain and France. By fusing their hip hop with a classical flute solo by La Orquesta Aragón in the song “A lo cubano,” they accomplish this in two ways. Due to the fact that la Aragón is considered the classic ambassador of Cuban culture and the musical institutions through which Cuba re-establishes its ancestral ties with the African continent during the 1970s, the song “*A lo cubano*” embarks on a trans-Atlantic journey to Cuba’s African roots to later embark on another journey to its European roots.

The presence of Compay Segundo, of the famed Buena Vista Social Club, in the song “537 C.U.B.A.,” demonstrates Orishas’s marked homage to the Cuban musical legacy they have inherited and that through their music remains palpable for consumers worldwide. In the same way that La Aragón is synonymous with the cha-cha-chá genre

⁵⁹ *A lo cubano* 1999. Paname or Panam is an alternate name or argot for the city of Paris that dates back to the 19th century.

⁶⁰ Orishas, “Represent.”

for the past 60 years, Compay Segundo has been the icon of Cuban *son guajiro* since Buena Vista's return to the music scene in the late 1990s. Orishas successfully appropriates not only the Cuban rhythms these artists are known for but the symbolic capital that these artists represent, thus inserting themselves in Cuban musical history as representatives of the hip hop genre. As shown in the lyrics of this song, they and Compay have similar projects—to disseminate Cuban musical culture—although Orishas takes to a non-traditional genre to do so. Both generations, as musically distant as they may be chronologically do conflate in a Special Period Cuba that, through foreign investors, promotes both Buena Vista and Orishas globally within years of one another. Orishas follows suit, as the song reveals, with a legacy Compay has already secured with consumers of Cuban music:

*Lo que impulso
Y que se pega,
Y cuando llega
No despega,
Pega, pega lo que puso
El Ruzzo en el discurso
Que Compay Segundo puso
Entre tus cejas.⁶¹*

In this way, Compay is one of the ancestros that Orishas represents throughout the album. Orishas employs the landmark “Chan Chan” in “537 C.U.B.A.” to comment on a nostalgic lament of the transitory Cubanness they experience. Despite the specificity with which the chorus of the song localizes Orishas's origin, relying on prototypical images of the Cuban countryside, “*Vengo de donde hay un río, tabaco, y cañaveral, donde el sudor del guajiro hace a la tierra soñar,*” this place is but a geographic point. It

⁶¹ Orishas, “537 C.U.B.A.” Ruzzo refers to the stage name of one of the members of Orishas.

is, along with Alamar, la calle 23 y 12, and Paseo del Prado, mentioned throughout the song, mappable places that tie the members of Orishas to an imagined Cuba. Even though the sense of hope is present in the song, the hope of returning to that supposed place of origin, the absence of a place to call their own is all the more present,

Flotando ando pasando la mano, "mano"
Sobre el mapa de este mundo
Y desde lo profundo de mi corazón siento nostalgia,
Una extraña sensación como añoranza
De esta distancia
Que se interpone.⁶²

The perceptible distance from that longed for place, evident in the separation of the word C.U.B.A. as well as the image of the floating citizen, left homeless in an undefined place or zone, communicated the oscillatory trans-Atlantic condition of the album *A lo cubano* as well as that of the members of Orishas.

The image of an undecipherable, undefined map reappears on the cover of Orishas's second musical production, *Emigrante*. The condition of dislocation that the title communicates—referencing he who leaves his place of origin behind and lives a transitory existence—is the recurring theme throughout the songs included in the 2002 production, reaffirming the trans-Atlantic nature of their music. Amongst the various elements of an intrinsically symmetric graphic, surrounded by Cuban cultural symbols Orishas's members appear in the center of a blank map, locating them in a lack of place.

⁶² Ibid

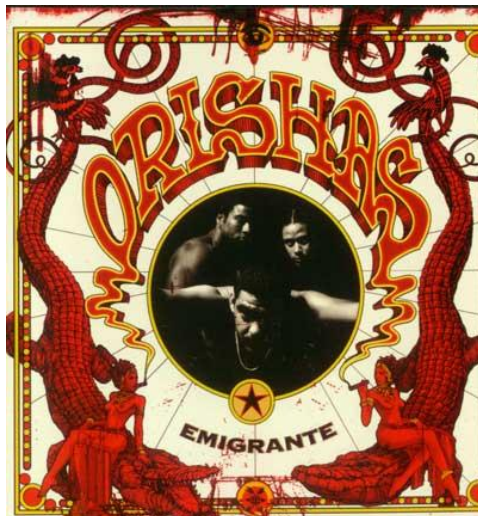


Figure 3.3 Orishas’ “Emigrante” (2002) CD Cover

On either side of the members there are red alligators whose bodies replicate the contour of the Cuban island—an aggressive one that seems to challenge the other more submissive one—while two women, cigar in mouth, each sitting atop an alligator, seem to challenge one another with their intense glances. The smoke that emanates from these iconic cigars form oscillatory clouds that spell out: ORISHAS while simultaneously evoking a common practice in *santería* rituals where the smoke is an offering from worshippers to the worshipped pantheon. The roosters pictured, sacrificial animals in said rituals as well as another indispensable element in *santería* practices, *firmas* or signatures, composed of magic symbols—circles, lines, crosses, curves, bows, arrows, the moon and sun combined to give signatures their ritual power.⁶³ Equally as powerful and perhaps more thought provoking is a stabbed bleeding tongue that protrudes from an eye. It makes reference to an eyewitness of an injustice who has spoken the truth of that injustice. The dagger represents the punishment received for a perceptible treason

⁶³ María Teresa Vélez. *Drumming For The Gods: The Life and Times of Fernando Villamil, Santero*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000).

committed in the speaking of an unspeakable truth, for being a *chivato/a*.⁶⁴ The blood that trickles down from the eye falls upon one of Orishas's members, suggesting that there is perhaps a (perceived or intentional) act of lyrical treason. The fact that all the elements imposed on the map are red, seemingly drenched in blood, screams immigrant as sacrificial wanderer condemned to an ambulatory existence, fighting to survive in an undefined space/place. What keeps Orishas rooted in their place of origin amidst this floating state that is proper of the immigrant is an imagined Cuba, represented by the solitary star infamous for its meaning to Castro's Revolution and its association with Che Guevara's image. The star, here functioning almost as a thumbtack that neatly keeps Orishas in place, is the lone star of the Cuban flag which is itself surrounded by the color red, historically symbolic of the blood that *héroes de la patria*, heroes of the homeland, have shed in combat for Cuban freedom. Here a black star outlined in red, the symbol speaks to the sacrifice and suffering of the Afro-Cuban immigrant.

“Oye dicen que... Dicen que fue pa’ Europa y cuando llegó yaaaa... tremenda desilusión...” serves as the opening to the song entitled “Emigrante.” Orishas, themselves the product of a trans-Atlantic migratory journey, confronts the topics of racism against the immigrant “Other,” an experience which they, even as award winning artists, could not circumvent. Reproaching the host nation, Orisha sings *“Me has colonizado y ahora discriminas mi raza,”* thus expressing the difficulty of being racialized immigrants who through their music have represented *“las inferencias y penurias de este lado del continente colonizao, explotao, marcao.”* This overwhelming sentiment of knowing and

⁶⁴ *Chivato* is the word used colloquially to refer to someone who reveals a secret or information that should not be known.

being marginalized is trans-Atlantic in nature as historically Afro-Cubans had been marginalized in their own society, following social hierarchies established by the Spanish Crown that held true during the governments of Machado, Batista, and Castro and with an ever more dichotomized Cuba of the Special Period. To belong to or be relegated to the margin is synonymous with a lack of place other than the periphery, the place of the Other, the forgotten, and the disenfranchised from the social ladder. With this song and the album in its entirety, Orishas breaks from a Cuba-centric project that marked their initial musical production two years earlier to create a more pan-Latin project that finds a common root in racial discrimination. Orishas claims to have a brotherhood with Peruvians, Chileans, and Colombians—otherwise piled together in Spain under the derogatory umbrella term—*sudaca* to whom they dedicate the song “Emigrante,”

*Pa' mi gente, esos que llaman emigrantes
 Son personas comunes, corrientes
 Oye mi gente por tener
 Otro color, otra forma de pensar
 Dos culturas diferentes, yo no me puedo quedar.*⁶⁵

If the migratory experience unites those who are by virtue of immigration in a floating state, Orishas proposes a global brotherhood—that those who have been the product of historical colonization join forces to fight immigrant inequality in the colonizer’s territory. It is not in vain that Orishas chooses these three South American countries to name in the song given that in numbers, they are amongst the most populous in Spain, more specifically, Madrid, at the end of the century and into the present. Orishas makes

⁶⁵Orishas, “Emigrante,” *Emigrante* rec. 2002 (EMI France)

this call for unity through the hip hop genre, a resource marginalized youth have used globally to combat racism against the racialized “Other.”

The song “300 Kilos” in particular achieves a musical brotherhood as Orishas joins the Colombian group Yerbabuena for a fusion sound that inch toward leaving the place of origin behind to incorporate other Latin sounds in their music. Also notable is code switching whereby words specific to the Spanish lexicon of Spain—the *vosotros* form and the word *rollo*—substitute Cuban and Colombian versions of these words. This seems to indicate that the immigrant subject adapts to and even appropriates elements of the host culture without sacrificing a sense of nationalism and pan-Latinism tied to a geographic imaginary. The song challenges any misreading of their musical project as anything other than a reflection of a firmly rooted Cuban identity,

*Para el mundo entero entono mi canción
Es una mezcla cubana
Hoy no acepto confusión
Comenzó esta historia
Hace algún tiempo ya
Hasta que no toque el cielo no la vamos a parar.⁶⁶*

It is evident that Orishas perceives their music as a symbolic journey that alongside their physical journey of immigration, allows them to invent and re-invent what is Cuban and what it means to be Cuban from a trans-Atlantic perspective. They employ the image of a train in transit, under their command, that will continue disseminating the message of their Afro-Cuban roots through the market of cultural production. Although the sounds of

⁶⁶ Orishas, “300 Kilos,” *Emigrante*.

this song are a mix, they use a play on words to identify the island influence by way of Compay Segundo's "Chan Chan":

*Sabes... la música cubana
Esta es la nueva era
Aunque te duela
En el volante Orishas el tren
Va repartiendo su mercancía
Urbana poesía...
Orishas a lo cubano
Puso nuevo jefe al mando
chao chao, tren de medianoche va chan- chan- do.*

With this musical production, Orishas shows that to be an immigrant is to be subject to transit but it does not change what they represent on the market.

Orishas takes us from 300 kilos to just one, *El Kilo*—their third musical production released in 2005 by EMI Spain. They return to music scene, six years after their initial appearance, with an image of Cuba and all things Cuban that is stronger, more varied and more trans-Atlantic. If *Emigrante* denied a specific geographic location, *El Kilo* zones in on the Cuban topography as a starting point for the production. With a map of Cuba in the foreground of the CD's cover and Havana's famed Malecón boardwalk in the background, Orishas undoubtedly locate themselves on the island.



**Figure 3.4 Orishas' "El Kilo" (2005)
CD Cover**

Nonetheless, each member's caricature superimposed on the island's map points to, as I have argued, that although Cuba is claimed as place of origin, it is done so only geographically. None of the artists face the audience of this cover as they did, rather defiantly, with the two earlier productions. Instead, Ruzo the dread-wearing rapper faces the direction of the United States, perhaps a foreshadowing of the collaboration between Orishas and Cuban-American rap sensation Pitbull on the album's last track. Meanwhile, the braid-sporting Yotuel and *El sonero* pictured below him, both fix their gazes on the other side of the Atlantic, setting their sites on Europe and Africa respectively. The fact that all three rappers are depicted with their eyes closed indicates an instability of location, blind movement in an undefined gray zone. This cover, as text, speaks to the fusion that undoubtedly characterizes Orishas's hip hop sound. Theirs is a transculturated sound of African-American lyrical style, Cuban classical rhythms of Afro-European syncretism produced by young mulattos who promote a militant Afro-Cuban identity on Spanish soil. Amidst this mix of musical origins, the origin of their hip hop is subject to disarticulation and thus the need to rely on Cuban national images—Havana, allusions to

the flag and its solitary star, the freedom fighter's *machete*, and *firmas paleras*—as unifying symbols of a Cuban identity. Unlike the cover of *A lo cubano* where the members express their militant character associated with Afro-Cuban warriors, here the intent is to identify with *mambises*, those *criollos* who fought against the Spaniards in the War for Independence in the 19th century. The “I” in Orishas is actually a machete, weapon of the *mambises*, and the dot of that “I” is the lone star of the Cuban flag. If the flag itself dissolves over the three faces of the group's members, leaving the star of independence to stand alone, symbolic of Cuba's post-colonial state, Orishas inserts itself in a historic battle to have the voice of the “Other” heard as an act of patriotism. As Cuban roots take American and Spanish routes, political and cultural genealogies are mobilized along with the dispersed nation so as to relocate *el cubano* and *lo cubano* in the geographies of national identities. With memories of an unresolved past marking the condition of displacement, diasporic communities are de-territorialized but not detached from the homeland and they can not escape defining themselves in relation to a past national history. By remembering the battles *there then* and fighting them *here now* the struggle continues; it has not been lost. Wounded by history, diasporic culture hurts and in the words of Frederic Jameson, “history's alienating necessities will not forget us (the nation) and it will set limits to individual and collective freedom.”⁶⁷ Hence, the utopian recovery project of diasporic cultural nationalism, trapped in the homogeneous time of its imagined community, is marked by what Bhabha calls “the anti-progressive process of repetition.”⁶⁸ As diasporic subjectivity is crosscut and displaced by race, gender, and

⁶⁷ As quoted in Gregory McClennan. “Together-in-difference: Beyond Diaspora, into Hybridity.” *Asian Studies Review*, 27(2: 2003): 43.

⁶⁸ Bhabha 187.

sexuality discourses that contemporary culture has inherited, the dystopic discrepancy of temporalities renders *el cubano* a *guerrillero* fighting historical memory in the present project of individual identity construction. The cartographies of diaspora thus reveal multiple localities in contradiction as different histories—national and individual—are articulated in the same geographic space. When the geographic spaces of diaspora are multiple, Spain and the United States in the Cuban case, the histories between nations are at play in the location of *el cubano*. As diasporic identity is in dialogue with the hegemonic imaginary of the new homeland, *el cubano*'s relational positioning is as internal (within the imagined community) as it is external (host community). The currency pictured on the cover—*el kilo*, a coin with a lone star in the center with an “I” that resembles the machete—is already trans-Atlantic as it is through their music that Orishas makes their money, i.e. currency, as artists in Europe. The trans-Atlantic nature of their sound is emphasized in the name of the group, written in an oscillatory calligraphy across the top of the cover that puts Orishas on the map beginning with an “O” in Havana's *Malecón* and ending with an “S” whose curvature signals an end that is far away from its beginning; Orishas as a journey, from Havana to the other side of the Atlantic. Notably, mid word, at the “S” that neatly divides the group's name in half, the letter is raised above the rest and wrapped around the *machete*. This becomes symbolic of the battle within the circular migration, the coming and going, the constant journey within a gray zone devoid of a defined point of departure and a point of return that Orishas lives as diasporic artists.

“Nací Orishas” is the opening song of the 2005 musical production and its chorus, “*Yo nací Orishas en el underground*” is reminiscent of the message they revealed in *A lo*

cubano's first song, "Represent" (1999). Orishas continues to associate their music with a struggle against the marginalization of blacks from their trans-Atlantic positioning. Their music is obviously a commercial product and is therefore not a product or a result of what aforementioned Cuban artists consider an *underground* sound. They however continue to proclaim an *underground* subjectivity that can be understood as a representation of the "Other," of the Afro-Cuban subject who sings from the margins in the diaspora. It is from a trans-Atlantic positioning that this marginalized Cuban subject has a voice. As the song reveals:

*Oísteis socio, te ponga boca arriba este negocio,
Del 97 vengo a filo de machete...
Tú sabes lo que lucho día a día
Pa' poner la cubanía al flow que tu querías...*⁶⁹

These lyrics are quite telling in regards to the arguments set forth here about the industry of cultural production. With these words, lead rapper Ruzzo speaks directly if rather defiantly to a *socio*. In the Cuban lexicon, this word is often used to refer to informally to a friend. However, being that there is specific talk of a business, the music business as can be inferred, *socio* thus takes on its more common meaning of a business partner or associate. There is a noteworthy code switch whereby the singular *socio* is being addressed in the plural *vosotros* form. While it is plausible that both the speed of the rapping coupled with the infamous Cuban "s" dropping in everyday speech come together in this verse, it is nonetheless indicating a message aimed directly at a music industry that while plural in its makeup is perceived as a singular, a monopoly.⁷⁰ Orishas

⁶⁹ Orishas, "Nací Orishas," *El kilo* rec. 2005 (EMI Spain)

⁷⁰ The inside cover of *El kilo* shows the lyric to be *oísteis socio*.

alludes to their success by saying they have turned this music business on its head, producing the type of lucrative Cuban *flow* that consumers wanted to hear. They speak to the 1990s, new millennium trend that Arlene Dávila notes in relation to Latino artists in the U.S. context, whereby non-Latinos attempt to “colonize” Latino artists culturally, politically and economically.⁷¹ In the case of Orishas, it is the Spanish label EMI Spain. It is precisely against this perceived colonization that Orishas fights against in their last album. It is indisputable that as artists who work for a Spanish label they are part of a larger project that Spain has at hand for conquering a global market through the monopolization of Cuban artists during the Special Period. However, for artists such as Orishas who view themselves as the voice of Cuba’s marginalized youth and the voice of the disenfranchised, racially marked, immigrant subject, it is of prime importance to reiterate loyalty to these causes. Their musical productions are the outcome of a mutually accorded business, a supply and demand dynamic where they are responsible for, as the above lyrics indicate, fighting, machete in hand, to win the battle against an industry that may push them to sell out and produce something other than what is true to their identity as artists. This is of prime concern for Cuban artists of the Special Period, intent on escaping the economic ills of the island with an artistic project as the opportunity to do so but burdened with the exigencies of a market that may not care to uphold their artistic visions and principles. This will be discussed later as it pertains to the artists featured in the co-produced film *Habana Blues*.

⁷¹ Arlene Dávila, *Latinos Inc. The Marketing and Making of a People*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

To this tension one can attribute the defensive tone of Orishas throughout the production as if responding to insinuations that their craft had been compromised by the market of cultural production. Beginning with the track “Yo nací Orishas,” they inform the audience about the trials and tribulations of the music business in their three year hiatus, “*El negocio no está fácil queda poco pa’ inventar pa encontrar la melodía tienes que ser natural.... cantar como el primero.*” Their success in producing lies in being natural, singing naturally about issues that naturally speak to their subject position as young, Afro-Cuban youth. They must give their audiences the songs and sounds, as they did on their first album that put them on the global musical map, an album with lyrics that stays true to artistic integrity. The same song ends with a chorus dedicated to those who have questioned their fidelity to their musical project, “*pa’l que dice que el son me lo han robao,*” reminding them that for someone who was born Orishas, a warrior, nothing can be robbed, nothing can be taken for the battle is theirs to win, musical/lyrical machete in hand. This recurring theme is seen in “La vacuna,” a song where they speak about this album as a cure-all vaccine against the rabid rumors of their disappearance from the market because they had lost the source of inspiration as a direct result of their immigration. Their musical rebuttal ends with the confrontational song, “¿Quién te dijo a ti?” where they question the source of rumors about their lack of voice as artists under a Spanish label who with time had lost their “Cuban” charm and/or had simply abandoned the fight against racism. Roldán sings:

*Siempre se comenta, todo el mundo quiere hablar...
Se dice que los Orishas ya no dan para más, repito
Que el oro la plata y la fama Los van a tumbar,
¡Qué va!*

The chorus “*Quien te dijo a ti que yo me perdí con tantas cosas que yo tengo para decir,*” is an affirmation that the battle is ongoing and that Orishas has not succumbed to their subject positions as immigrants or immigrant artists. Perhaps what is most clearly heard, of the things they have to say, is the decision to record this track with the Cuban-American hip hop artist, Pitbull. In a complete break with a recording history that has been centered on Spain and France, Orishas joined diasporic forces with a Miami-based rapper who despite being self-identified as racially white identifies musically with a Southern Crunk⁷² sound that is African American. It seems that both the hip hop genre and their Cuban roots have brought them together to produce the song. Rapping from Miami, the city that is a Havana part two of sorts, Pitbull’s musical productions demonstrate what Gustavo Pérez-Firmat would call a Y.U.C.A (Young Urban Cuban American) identity. It is an identity that is racialized, spacialized, and generationalized. While the evident cultural nationalism in Pitbull’s (Cuban) flag waving, Cuban lingo use, and Celia Cruz/José Martí appropriations in lyrics, song titles, and music videos attest to his identification with *lo cubano* he simultaneously, through the rap genre, identifies with African American culture.⁷³ Hence, Pitbull’s is a transcultured subjectivity that beyond negotiating the hyphen between Cuban (*cubanía* as it is constructed within Miami’s imagined community) and American negotiates ethnic and racial identities within the borders of the ‘hood. Pitbull and Orishas seem to converge in a music that identifies with

⁷² Crunk is a style of hip hop that originated in Memphis, Tennessee in the mid-to-late 1990s and gained mainstream success around 2003–2004. It uses a drum machine rhythm, heavy bass, and shouting vocals, often in call and response manner. The term crunk is also used as a blanket term to denote any style of southern hip hop, a side effect of the genre's breakthrough to the mainstream.

⁷³ Because Martí struggled for Cuban independence he is also considered a national hero for the Cuban-American community.

a Cuban experience, American in the case of the former and Peninsular in the case of the latter that speaks of the realities of the intermingling of various Latino diasporic communities with African American communities in *barrios* that redefine urbanities and urbanites. In “¿Quién te dijo a ti?,” it is left up to Pitbull to rap about the controversial nature of this collaboration with Orishas which both sets of artists recognize but deliberately bypass. Pitbull, in an aggressive, defiant manner befitting of his name, sings:

*Orishas and Pitbull whatcha gonna do?
 We don't give a f**k who we runnin' through
 Us, give up? You must be crazy...
 No ifs, ands, buts or maybes... blazin' Dade County
 Orishas, Pitbull ¡ay! ¡Qué lío! ¡Lío! Viviendo el sueño mío
 Si no te gusta lo que estamos haciendo pana, dale pa' llá*

Cognizant of the troublesome nature of singing with Orishas, Pitbull addresses the underlying issues with a Latin music industry based in Miami that, controlled almost in its entirety by Gloria and Emilio Estefan, is marked by a clear political agenda that boycotts Cuban artists with conflicting political views. This trend resonates with Keith Negus's observation that music is not simply received as sound.⁷⁴ In her book *Musical ImagiNation*, María Elena Cepeda dedicates a chapter entitled “A Miami Sound Machine” to the dominance that the Estefans have held in the Latin music industry since the 1990s. Emilio Estefan has produced songs for his wife, the late Celia Cruz, Albita, Cachao, Shakira, Thalía, Alejandro Fernández, Ana Gabriel, Alexandre Pires, Jon Secada, Jennifer López, Ricky Martin, Marc Anthony and La India. Their label—Crescent Moon Studios—is a Sony affiliate that has single-handedly materialized Miami as the undisputed ‘Latin Hollywood,’ where Emilio Estefan not only is said to have

⁷⁴ Keith Negus. *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures*. (London: Routledge, 1999), Introduction.

created the Latin ‘Miami Sound’ but by having all the artists of this sound under his label, controls the workings of the industry. This includes control over the Grammys which the musical mogul family began to produce in 2002 when they joined forces with the BMI label, a branch of Universal Music that has global reach. By 2005, the label which already produced artist of the pop, rock and salsa genres expanded to include rap and reggeatón.⁷⁵ Signed under the Sean Combs label Bad Boy Records, the 2005 joint venture with the Estefans, it was Pitbull’s representatives who approached Orishas regarding the recording. In an interview I conducted with Roldán in 2005, he confessed the shock factor that accompanied the request. Roldán said, “*Somos diferentes tipos de cubanos. Su concepto de Cuba es muy diferente a la nuestra* (sic).” Perhaps it is the agreement to disagree on what being Cuban means, opting instead to focus on the music and its message, that leads them to produce a song that speaks about a pan-Latin identity sung to the tunes of Jamaican reggae and Trinidadian Coolie rhythms. The Caribbean sound is only interrupted by a brassy trumpet whose screech evokes the carnival songs of Cuba’s Oriente region that accompanies Pitbull’s confrontational lyrics mentioned above.

For Orishas, the collaboration was a fruitful one insofar as it brought the Cuban group back into contact with an American market who had heard them on the soundtrack of *Dirty Dancing II: Havana Nights* in 2004. With a lackluster reception on the Miami-based Latin market of the famed song “Represent” off the film’s soundtrack, their production efforts once again turned solely to the European markets that launched their careers. It was precisely the cultural ties between France and Cuba’s Asociación

⁷⁵ Maria Elena Cepeda, *Musical ImagiNation*. (New York: New York University Press, 2010) 45.

Hermanos Saíz that allowed the members of Orishas to partake in a musical exchange whereby the group was formed, named and later recorded both there and in Spain. Were the agenda for the Miami market and its leaders different, it is quite plausible that Orishas's sound—that fusion of traditional Cuban rhythms, identifications with Afro-Cuban cultural elements and a call to unity with other immigrants worldwide all to the tune of rap—would be amongst those on the Estefan label. The only difference between Orishas's project and that of a very similar rap artist, Cuban American Don Dinero who has carved a niche on the Miami music scene, is 90 miles of separation and trans-Atlantic immigration.

Regardless of the reasons that may have motivated Pitbull and Orishas to see the collaboration through in *El Kilo*, it is evident, as Juan Otero-Garabís has noted, that popular culture, mediated by the market of signifiers dependent on the industry of cultural production, wavers between production and consumption.⁷⁶ Each artist has negotiated the stance they want to associate with their music—Orishas raps “*Que te enteres Cuba es mi patria asere*” to revert to an affinity with the island, while Pitbull raps “*Si tú crees que voy a pará estás equivocao*” to reaffirm his commitment to a musical sound and not a political project.

“Distinto” is a song that for the first time establishes a dialogue with marginalized Afro-Cubans on the island, perhaps even other island rappers, from their trans-Atlantic subjectivity. They sing:

⁷⁶ Otero-Garabís 26.

*Si el idilio te castiga con mi canto
 Que te traigo al negro
 Déjate aconsejar, solo queremos cantar
 Si las cosas que te pasan no tienen santo ni remedio
 Busca una rumba buena que te lleve al altar
 Háblame sin dolor
 Dale ya pasa la voz.
 Si no te van a meter en el saco de los que niegan,
 Que esto es Cuban hip hop y que se pega⁷⁷*

The need for a brotherhood and for a return to the altar—to the Orishas’s deities and to them as a musical source—through the rumba and hip hop genres is expressed here as voices of and for the marginalized who need to come together in a trans-Atlantic alliance. From their relocation in Spain, Orishas attempts to prove that their hip hop actively upholds the battle against racism despite being commercialized artists. It is a message that is also communicated in the opening line of the song “El kilo,” “*A mi estilo te canto mi negro, a mi estilo voy.*” It goes on to speak about the value of *el kilo*, as the least valuable of Cuban coins, akin to a penny, is known. “*Tíralo, pásalo pásalo, asere no, se te olvidó que el kilo no tiene vuelto no.*” With this lyric, it brings to mind a common expression in everyday Cuban speech, *No vale un kilo prieto*, which emphasizes the lack of monetary value of a dark coin, an allusion to the depreciation of Afro-Cubans. This allusion is better understood when they sing about “*una mentira que puede correr por años*”—the fib about racial equality and racial inferiority being a plausible reading in the context of Orishas’s critique. It is a point they drive home in the song “Tumbando y Dando” where they say “*El color se mide en todos sitios por lo que valen.*” Ironically, the economic capital that Orishas acquires is accomplished because of musical history whose

⁷⁷ Ibid, “*Distinto*”

symbolic capital is rich, thus proving that *un kilo prieto* can be worth more much more than it is thought to be worth.

Spanish Peninsula Afro-Cubanized

*Siembro porque aquí falta, Guantanamera.*⁷⁸

The fragmentation of Spain during the *Transición* of the post-Franco era resulted in the reemergence of peripheric nationalisms in the Autonomous Communities of the country—the Basque Country, Catalunya, Andalucía, and Galicia—giving Spain an undisputed cultural plurality. In his essay “Collective Memory, the Nation-State and Post-Franco Society,” Michael Richards speaks to this national change:

It was inevitable, as society began to contemplate life after Franco by the early 1970s, that the question of regional representation and the relationship of state to nation and nationalities would again rise to the surface of political debate surrounding the new Constitution approved in 1978... The existence of other nationalities became a primary focus of attention. Although the Constitution was based on the ‘indivisible unity of the Spanish Nation’ and Castilian remained the official language of the state, the right to autonomy of the nationalities within the state was guaranteed and other languages were to be official in their respective Autonomous Communities.⁷⁹

The recognition of a multilingual nation-state allows the creation of a space for the voice of the “Other” and within the scheme of migratory flows, it is key in permitting the development of a nationalist tune such as the one that Orishas brings to Spain through

⁷⁸ Orishas

⁷⁹ Michael Richards, “Collective Memory, The Nation-State and Post-Franco Society”, (in *Contemporary Spanish Cultural Studies* ed. Barry Jordan and Rikki Morgan-Tamosunas. London: Arnold, 2000), 45.

their hip hop music two decades later. As Richards points out, Spain's democratic governments that followed during the 1980s and 1990s stressed openness to the outside world, to which Cuba was no exception, which in turn led to Spain's growing role in international affairs. In 1982 came membership in NATO, 1991 was the year Spain hosted the First Middle East Peace Conference and 1992 was its crowning year when Madrid was named European Cultural Capital, the Universal Expo was held in Seville and Olympic Games took place in Barcelona. It was clear that in less than twenty years following Franco's death, Spain had finally arrived onto the world stage as a politically significant player and had become a stage for the performance of international events.⁸⁰ Spain had indeed become an attractive place, also becoming a mecca for immigration mostly from Latin America and Africa given its economic stability and the promise of an integrated multi-cultural society.⁸¹ By 1992, year of the *encuentro* or *El Quinto Centenario*, as celebrations that lauded Spain's imperial history were under way, so were the makings of a new Iberic nation of nations. This opening of a new Spain coincided with a racial fragmentation taking place in Cuba during the Special Period. If the 1990s marked the historic moment for rap to become an escape route through which Afro-Cuban youth could express a frustration with their place in Cuban society, to give voice to this racialized and marginalized sector of society, the newly plural Spain seemed to be the most fitting of places to receive such an artistic expression.

⁸⁰ Ibid 45.

⁸¹ Joaquín Roy. *España y Cuba: Una relación muy especial*. (Catedrático de Relaciones Internacionales de la Universidad de Miami) www.cidob.es/castellano/publicaciones.

Taking the cultural and historic ties between Spain and its praised Cuban colony, it is possible to interpret Orishas's hip hop, an expression of Afro-Cuban identity, as another peripheric nationalism within Spain's borders. It is a Cubanized nationalism with a black or mulatto face that expresses an undefined or trans-Atlantic origin through the hip hop genre. As expressed by Orishas in their song "Tumbando y Dando":

*Siembro porque aquí falta, guantanamera.
Con mi canción te quiero hacer a ti,
Que escuchas, la voz de mi generación
Mi sol, mi son, mi canción
Aquí falta guajira al golpe e' tambor...*⁸²

Orishas proposes a colonizing, albeit musically, of the *ilé*—their new home, land of the colonizer—with a syncretic sound born of the Conquest and that takes on life as a viable artistic voice of protest from a trans-Atlantic stance.⁸³ Orishas being the top selling hip hop group in Spain during the 1990s shows a pattern of consumption that is more prone to accept this "Othered" Cuban voice than a peripheric Peninsular one. It is perhaps the prominence of a romanticized Cuba, last colony of the Americas in the Spaniard imaginary that it can even if symbolically through music come into being as part of the periphery. In accordance with the premise of imperial nostalgia, it would seem to be the case. If Cuba is part of the national family as imagined, as mourned, as celebrated because there is a triumphant return to reintegrate the lost colony—through power relations established in the industry of cultural production, here music—Orishas's success would indicate a homecoming that welcomes the racialized face of the 'Other' who is partly if not completely Spanish.

⁸² Orishas *El Kilo*.

⁸³ *Ilé* is the Yourba term for house/ home/ place of the family.

Beyond the historical and cultural ties between Cuba and Spain, the workings of a supply and demand in the industry of cultural production must be taken into account. Adorno insisted on analyzing music's economic base and without a doubt Orishas's transnational success has as much to do with the symbolic capital of Cuban music as with the economic capital that the image of a tropicalized and racialized Cuba insures. As defined by Frances Aparicio,

Tropicalization means to trope, to imbue a particular space, geography, group, or nation with a set of traits, images and values that are circulated and perpetuated through official texts, history, literature, and the media.⁸⁴

If Spain has been a major investor in Castro's Cuba since the 1990s and provides the impetus that sustains the tourism industry in an island that sells itself as black, mulatto and sexualized (*jineterismo turístico*) during the Special Period, Orishas's acceptance in the market could simply be a consumer trend toward the tropical or Latin. Spain would be exposed to the same Latin craze of the 1990s that, as Cepeda documents from the United States standpoint, brings Ricky Martin and Jennifer López fever to the international stage. All of these artists share what Cepeda calls a "race music," a term that while no longer employed by consumers or executives, persists in the repackaging of R&B, hip hop and Latino forms among others.⁸⁵ That race, that tropical blackness is consumed because of its sheer allure in a forbidden Cuba recently open to foreign investment, because of its cultural capital long established through a rich history of musical exchanges between

⁸⁴ Frances Aparicio and Susana Chávez-Silverman. *Tropicalizations: Transcultural Representations of Latinidad*. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997), 6.

⁸⁵ Cepeda, 58.

island and Peninsula and the convergence of those two into a booming economic capital for Spanish labels backing artists like Orishas.

Orishas—A New Musical Chapter

Nationalist projects rely on the invention and reinvention of national identities whereby cultural practices enter into dialogue to surface as symbols of a united nation. In the case of Cuba, the discourse around Afro-Cuban identity has been appropriated in the Special Period context to imagine a nation whose national unity is expressed through music. This cultural resource has served as trans-Atlantic ambassador of an Afro-centric unity—from the *negrismo* through the hip hop revolution—and has allowed its protagonists an Afro-Cuban nationalism abroad. The national identity that Carpentier imagined from Paris becomes a transnational product for export, which appropriated six decades later, opens doors and markets for Orishas's music in both France and Spain.

A new chapter in the production of trans-Atlantic music is written with the advent of Orishas on the world market scene. The acceptance and marketing of Orishas's nationalist sound is as tied to socio-political and economic changes of a Cuba in crisis in a post-Soviet world as it is tied to a Spain that, economically stable and intent on proving its integration into a European Union by recovering the glory of days past, sets the stage for the convergence of these two side of the Atlantic through the music industry. Cuba and its music has always existed in the Spanish imaginary and it is how Cuba has been imagined and sold—racialized, tropicalized, domestic in a foreign sense—that has attributed to the success of Orishas on the music circuit.

Although *A lo cubano* (1999), *Emigrante* (2002) and *El kilo* (2005) speak to and perpetuate an image of Cuba as Black, Orishas indeed sings to the beat of a new tune because they speak to the transitory and undefined state of the immigrant subject whose roots are firmly in place while their routes are not. While Orishas's identity is linked to images of Cuba and the pantheon of Cuban deities, their lyrics identify them as trans-Atlantic cultural mediators. They are, as artists and as immigrants, oscillatory beings of mixed blood and ancestry whose place of origin is Cuba but whose place in the world is undefined, floating, as their songs reveal, over the world map. Travelers in an indefinite, undefined journey, coming and going, it is from this lack of place that they gather their musical inspiration, from this gray zone their grace (*achê*), and they transport their song to and from both sides of the Atlantic.

Habana Abierta: Rocking To The Cuban Diasporic Experience

*Como soy cubano te traigo este
funky blues con guaguancó*⁸⁶

Habana Abierta is a rock fusion group whose origin dates back to 1980s Cuba. Composed of young musicians who met in Havana's Vedado neighborhood, Habana Abierta created a new sound that cleverly meshed national musical genres with more universal ones. This openness to foreign musical influences (hence the abierta in their stage name) distinguished the new sound—"rockason," "timbaconrock," "rumbaconfunk" or "congaconpop"—of a new generation born in the 1970s and living their youth during Cuba's Special Period. Habana Abierta's career begins to unfold in Spain in the mid-

⁸⁶ "Como soy cubano", *Boomerang*, rec. Habana Abierta, 2006

1990s, a direct result of the 1992 celebrations commemorating the Fifth Centennial of the Spanish Conquest of the Americas. The Cuban trovadors Gema Corredera y Pável Urquiza had been asked to perform at these festivities in Spain and based on their success were asked by a Spanish label to scout a group that like them would bring an eclectic Cuban sound to the Spanish and global market. By 1996, most of Habana Abierta's eight members had arrived in Madrid to record the album *Habana Oculta* (Occult Havana), under the label Nubenegra. The Madrid-based company self-advertises as a label that specializes in the promotion of “ritmos negros y latinos y músicas del mundo.”⁸⁷ Under Nubenegra, the members of Habana Abierta (at the time called Habana Oculta) partook in rock tours throughout Spain in the late 1990s and made a name for themselves among Spanish audiences. By the time representatives of the label BMG went to Cuba's annual music fair, Cubadisco, with the intent of signing a band that fused a number of musical genres, Habana Abierta was in their radar. Their sound, described as “la música nueva de Cuba, la unión de la Nueva Trova, amalgama de alta poesía con lenguaje marginal, timba dura y canciones de amor” with a fusion of conga-funk, timba-rock, bolero-hop, chachachá-blues, son, pop and reggae sealed the deal for them.⁸⁸ Two years later their album *24 Horas* was selling at the top of the charts as they were considered an atypical and unusual musical phenomenon to come from Cuba, known mostly for its autochthonous sounds like son, guajira and more recently timba. Their success in Madrid secured collaborations with renowned Spanish artists such as Ketama, Ana Belén and Víctor Manuel. Four musical productions later—recorded and produced in Madrid, where

⁸⁷ <http://www.nubenegra.com/>

⁸⁸ As described by Luis Alberto García in the documentary *Habana Abierta* (2002).

the members still reside—Habana Abierta continues to be a palpable presence in the city’s musical life. Although no longer recording as Habana Abierta, since 2006 the artists have been working on their solo careers and they reunite once a year to do an Habana Abierta concert in Madrid’s Sala Clamores.



Figure 3.5 Sala Clamores, Madrid



Figure 3.6 Habana Abierta’s Boris Larramendi after solo concert at Clavel 8 in Madrid. “Chago”, Madrid-based Cuban writer and Daniel Díaz Torres, controversial Cuban film director of Alicia en el pueblo de las maravillas 1991

Habana Abierta’s Boomerang Effect

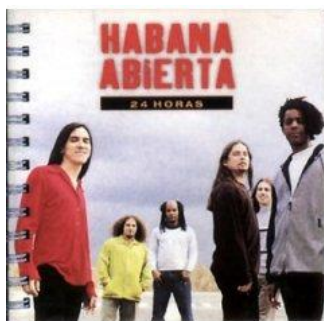


Figure 3.7 Habana Abierta’s “24 Horas” (1999) CD Cover



Figure 3.8 Habana Abierta’s “Boomerang” (2006) CD Cover

Without a doubt, Habana Abierta's musical *ajiaco* feeds a commercial need to produce world beat music. It was both the U.S. embargo against Cuba dating to the 1960s and the 1988 Trading with the Enemy Act, Cepeda has observed, which threw Cuban music into the World Beat category whose main consumers are non-Latino.⁸⁹ Although artists like Habana Abierta may not cater to and are often censured by U.S. based audiences, primarily those in Miami, their success abroad to an extent relies on not being able to break into the American market because they can continue to be packaged as the 'Other' forbidden sound. Their last production, *Boomerang* (2006) speaks directly to this dilemma, of the positionality of Cuban artists in a market that depends on the Latin audience of the United States in order to cross over. As Cuban artists of the Spanish diaspora, their music is subject to a boomerang effect, the basis of the plot of the film *Habana Blues* (2005) to be discussed in the next chapter, where the musicians' perceived political stances as immigrants to Spain but with viable ties to Cuba limits their U.S. marketability in an industry that is largely dominated by the adamantly anti-Castro Estefan family. The need to then place Habana Abierta in a world beat category is a direct result of Miami-Havana politics that spill over into an inflexible Miami-controlled music industry. Ultimately, it is both unrestrained access and investment power, privileges that arise from a Special Period Cuba and a post 1992 Spain that allow Spanish labels to sign artists such as Habana Abierta and promote them under the world beat category. Orishas too is marketed as world beat yet because it is a race music, it is not easily identifiable as such. Orishas and their followers would not consider their sound world beat but rather Cuban hip hop, that is to say, hip hop of Cuban origin.

⁸⁹ Cepeda 55.

However, rock and more specifically rock fusion which is what Habana Abierta brings to the market is considered alternative, a hybrid sound that is not necessarily Cuban despite the fusion of Cuban elements and thus neatly fits in a multi-faceted world beat category. It is likewise an appropriate category because Habana Abierta's music does not originate in a country like Argentina that established a legitimate *rock nacional* in the 1970s and thus they have not formed part of a national, recognized rock movement. The world music category would probably be replaced—if they were signed to a U.S. music labels—by that of *rock en español* in the likes of Maná or Caifanes. The category itself, when it comes to discussions of nationalism and the voicing of local cultures has its pros and its cons. The positive side of such a category, according to Michele Mattelart:

It is a model of everything that is right with the global vision of culture, which also means that it avoids the pitfalls of the same: exoticizing or fetishizing of "Third World" artists and artifacts, superficial representations of history and culture.⁹⁰

Certainly, from an artist's point of view, this tropicalization of his/her art threatens to trump the value of the art, the message that it is intended to convey. Orishas has been able to surpass such an eminent threat by refusing, lyrically, to represent anything other than the lived and felt experiences of marginalized Afro-Cuban youth both on the island and as immigrants in Europe. It is precisely the hip hop genre which allows them to remain true to their project. The genre almost begs for the voice of the disenfranchised, the telling of the story *like it is*. However, when faced with a world beat category the lingering question is whether or not it is a music representative of Cuba and a Cuban

⁹⁰ Michele Mattelart. "Global Image Markets",. In *Cultural Studies Guide*, ed. John Storey. (England: Pearson Education, 1994) 47.

experience of Cuba beyond the obvious answer, “It’s Cuban because the members were born in Cuba.” How does Habana Abierta not lose the local—voice, flavor, sound—in the face of the global? How does a Cuban audience identify, if it all, with this sound? Is a Cuban audience even a matter of concern, given that, as Cepeda observed, most of this music is to be consumed by non-Latinos (except, perhaps, in Spain)? If what makes Cuban music profitable is the symbolic capital that the weighty term “Cuban” carries, how does the world beat category hinder such associations in the consumption of this music? Can the category be understood as a form of colonization in its attempt to displace the national and find a binding homogenization or would it be an inaccurate analogue because world beat hints at the project of inclusion where the periphery belongs in the same space as the center? In the answers to these questions lie possible answers to the cons of the globalizing world beat category which have been addressed by scholars in the likes of Brazilian sociologist Renato Ortiz in *Los artifices de una cultura mundializada*.⁹¹ While Spanish labels are certainly exercising a type of imperial power over the Cuban music industry, reeling artists into the colonial diaspora in Madrid during the Special Period, the world music category does not have colonizing tendencies. The national is not erased in the marketing of Habana Abierta, rather it is emphasized because this identifier makes their records sell as they cash in on symbolic capital. Cuba and its music is again an exceptional case where it simply cannot, despite a global category, be disassociated from the tropics and its politics.

⁹¹ Renato Ortiz. *Los artifices de una cultura mundializada*. (Santa Fe de Bogotá: Siglo de Hombre Editores, 1998).

Thus, I argue that in the case of *Habana Abierta*, unlike *Orishas*, the Cuban element that the market wants to zone in on is that of the unexpected, rooted in stereotypes, myths and exoticization. Consumers expect a project like that of *Orishas*, a tropical sound that speaks to African roots and relies on a genre that albeit forbidden on the island at the time of its inception, is a genre proper of the racially disenfranchised. Consumers expect a Buena Vista Social Club phenomenon that resurrects the nostalgia of years past, which romanticizes the sound of the Cuban countryside in a country closed off to the rest of the world for decades. Consumers do not, however, expect Cuba to produce an alternative rock group, despite their existence alongside those of reggae groups, funk groups and others that are not typically associated with the Caribbean island.

This lack of association is erroneous as rock was influential in Cuba as well as the rest of Latin America. As Deborah Pacini Hernández points out in her anthology *Rockin Las Americas*, cultural imperialism was responsible for rock music being embraced by Latin American youth. She observes that the role of American-based transnational media—recording companies working alongside U.S. film and television production companies—ensured that rock would be widely accepted and produced “especially in countries such as Mexico and Cuba that already had extraordinarily vibrant and commercially successful national forms of popular music.”⁹² It is perhaps the myth of Cuba’s isolation in regards to cultural imperialism that has made audiences disregard the possibility of the existence of a Cuban rock sound. Nonetheless, the historic moment—Special Period Cuba opening its doors to foreign investors, allowing the world a peek at

⁹² Deborah Pacini Hernández. “Mapping Rock Music Across the Americas”. *Rockin Las Americas: The Global Politics of Rock in Latin/o America*. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press: 2004) 7.

what had become of this isolated communist island—made believing in this otherwise perceptible musical impossibility a reality. From the standpoint of the industry itself, an alternative Cuban sound such as rock fusion which is marketed as global spoke to an underground sound, a forbidden musical form which could feed into the politics of Cuba and censorship in the arts without confronting it head on.

Not Rocking to That Tune: The Politics of Music

The suppression of rock in Cuba is a more tangled one than that of hip hop and thus the controversy surrounding its censorship is all the more charged. In the mid-1960s when national *canCIÓN protesta* icon Silvio Rodríguez was fired from his job at the Cuban Radio and Television Institute after admitting the Beatles influenced his music, the Cuban government clearly expressed its stance against rock. Cuba's was an extreme example of rock's not so welcomed arrival on the global circuit and the impossibility of its emergence as a legitimate movement on the island. Here, the word movement must be considered alongside the Silvio Rodríguez episode. Following Giorgio Agamben—borrowing the notion of political tripartition from Nazi scholar Carl Schmitt—movement is one of three elements that constitute political unity. The State or political apparatus and the People, an un-political element that grows in the shadows of movement, make up the other two elements. Movement is defined as the dynamic political element that actually designates the direction that the People will take and whether or not they will be considered part of the national imaginary.⁹³ Including artists such as Silvio Rodríguez in a movement points at a passive politicization through which the People are included in

⁹³ Giorgio Agamben. "Movement." *Generation Online*. (2002) <http://www.generation-online.org/p/fpagamben3.htm>

the idea of the State. *La Nueva Trova* and its artists are thus centered; they belong and are recognized as belonging in the Cuban musical scene. The artists who make up Habana Abierta, in producing music that is outside the parameters of the accepted movement is in effect in motion, moving away from the established center where the People have been designated, losing its place in the national. Perhaps this is why their last musical production is laden with images of movement from its title *Boomerang* to the visual of said object with its own labeled trifecta Miami-Habana-Madrid. The movement of the boomerang speaks to the oscillatory motion, trans-Atlantic in nature, that has no discernable center but rather three equally possible originating points.

Deborah Pacini Hernández documents how rock became a controversial cultural force in other authoritarian contexts throughout Latin America such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Guatemala. Rock was at least allowed as an official form of expression unlike in Cuba but it was only through encoded narratives of resistance to political and social repression that youth rock bands avoided military censorship.⁹⁴ Overall, it was the tension between desires for local belonging negotiated with desires for cosmopolitan belonging which made rock problematic in Latin America. Rock's arrival signaled a fight for its glocalization, its domestication within Latin American cultural norms and became crucial to youth identification especially to protest political and social ills. For Latin American youth, local was synonymous with poverty and repression while cosmopolitan implied engaging with the influence of the U.S. or Western Europe which posed challenges for older generations. She explains that for younger generations rock was embraced "as an expression of urban modernity, youthful exuberance, and liberated nonconformity," while

⁹⁴ Pacini Hernández 14.

for Latin American elders “it was rejected vigorously as a symbol of U.S. cultural decadence and the seemingly unlimited power of the United States to force its products on unwilling nations.”⁹⁵ There was a general sentiment of distrust for the United States and its culture in light of world events where the country’s protagonism was less than lauded. Pacini Hernández aptly summarizes the paralleled chronology between history and rock history that renders the genre so problematic for older generation in Latin America:

As Bill Haley was “Rockin’ Around the Clock,” Latin Americans were still coming to terms with the consequences of the CIA’s direct role in the 1954 overthrow of Jacobo Arbenz, Guatemala’s first democratically elected president and a symbol for many Latin Americans of the possibilities for a nonviolent path to reform. While young people were twisting to Chubby Checker, CIA-trained forces were landing on the beaches of Playa Girón in Cuba, seeking to topple Fidel Castro’s new, revolutionary regime. Soon after, as the Beatles were instigating young people to let their hair hang down, the U.S. government was openly expressing support for a military coup in Brazil that had put an end to democracy in that country and that would keep the military in control for the next two decades. In 1965, as the Beach Boys were pining after “California Girls,” the United States was sending twenty thousand troops to the Dominican Republic in order to squelch the reform-minded democratic regime of Juan Bosch, perceived by the State Department as a possible “second Cuba.” And, as the hippie counterculture was reaching its apogee in the United States, the CIA was plotting with rightist elements in Chile to overthrow the elected socialist government of Salvador Allende, which in turn unleashed a brutal, fifteen-year-long repression under General Augusto Pinochet.⁹⁶

In the specific case of Cuba, which was under the staunch anti-American Left since the decade of the genre’s inception, rock was an imminent threat that became synonymous

⁹⁵ Ibid 43.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

with ideological diversionism. Although rock was suppressed and forced into the realm of underground, it was not eradicated as the likes of the Beatles and John Lennon, observes Pacini Hernández, “have acquired a significance to urban Cubans unmatched elsewhere in Latin America.”⁹⁷ Havana’s statue of John Lennon attests to this importance and the changes that the industry of cultural production—through its marketing of the Cuban rock sound in the music of Habana Abierta since the late 1990s—has allowed in state attitudes towards the genre.

The Sounds of Change(s)

Artists born into and of the Revolution, both the members of Orishas and Habana Abierta alike, should not have been producing music that evidently fused foreign influences in keeping with the myth of Cuban isolation and in faithfully upholding the principles of the Revolution which frowned upon any outside influence on all things Cuban. The music of both Orishas and Habana Abierta speak to sounds that should not have been born of the Revolution yet were; they should not have been readily available to Cubans, but they were; the world should not have known these influences existed on the island and the world should not have known they were unpatriotically appropriated, but they were. Here the allure of European markets to a sound that should not exist yet does. The success story of both musical groups despite initial censorship illustrates that a nationally groomed cultural form does not have to be validated locally in order to incarnate Cuban identity as long as the market exploits the symbolic capital of Cuban music. It was precisely their diaspora-based success which showed the obvious market

⁹⁷ Ibid 44.

for these musicians and their music—which led to changes in the official government attitude toward otherwise unacceptable forms of art. Their perceived treasonous nature was quickly replaced, in light of the Special Period, by a seemingly supportive attitude that results in government sponsored agencies to help develop these arts. The Orishas phenomenon inspired the creation of a hip hop festival and in the case of Habana Abierta, inspired the filming of a documentary spearheaded by the most trans-Atlantic of Cuban actors, Jorge Perugorría. In conjunction with the ICAIC and a Spanish film company, the protagonist of *Fresa y chocolate* (1994), *Guantanamera* (1994), *Dile a Laura que la quiero* (1995), *Lista de espera* (2000), *Tánger* (2003) and scores of other Cuban, Spanish, and Cuban-Spanish coproduced films, directed the 2002 documentary entitled *Habana Abierta* that documented the group's first official performance on the island since their departure. To have an official voice of the Cuban arts take on such a project and to ensure that Habana Abierta be the first rock band to officially perform in one of the most respected concert halls in Havana speaks to the ways in which the needs of the market can and do mold perceptions, valorizations and treatment towards the arts on the island.

With this said, the extent to which Cuban artists must compromise their artistic vision in order to adhere to the needs of the global market comes into play. Habana Abierta is a group that like Orishas underwent several name changes until they decided on this one—Open Havana—over the original Occult Havana. The image change that the name begs—from that which is concealed to that which is exposed—speaks of the process that the group underwent in order to become an attractive investment for Spanish labels in Madrid. Lyrically, Habana Abierta reveals the boomerang effect that has shaped their music and their experience as Cuban artists in Spain. While race is not a factor for

these musicians in their musical identity, nationality does play a role in their expression of the diasporic experience. Their music reflects the stereotypes associated with the Cuban immigrant and the degree to which it is expected that, in being saved from a dying music industry in Cuba, they are expected to mold their art to the market's vision of what Cuban rock should sound like.

This theme of artistic compromise serves as my lead into the filmic co-productions between Spain and Cuba that began in the early 1990s. I use Benito Zambrano's film *Habana Blues* (2005) as the transitional element that ties sound and image together before I delve into a full discussion about Cuba's film industry and the changes it underwent during the Special Period. *Habana Blues* is a fiction film based on Habana Abierta's story of negotiations with Spanish record labels which clearly depicts the moral and economic questions that arise for artists in their situation and the outcomes that "selling out" or remaining true to one's art entail. It is a theme that is also addressed in the documentary film *Habana Abierta* (2002) discussed alongside *Habana Blues* in the following chapter.

Chapter 4. Havana Seen, Havana Heard.

Cuban Sound in Image: The Case of *Habana Blues* and *Habana Abierta*

The increasing symbolic capital that Cuban culture acquired during the Special Period as a result of the island's aperture to the international community caught the eye of many Spanish film directors. The latter salvaged the once robust and globally famous Cuban film industry from extinction. However, the Messianic discourses that surround that relationship demonstrate—within the culture industry—the vestiges of imperial nostalgia that have shaped the artists' experience as artists who form part of the Cuban diaspora in Spain. It is an experience reflected in the subject matter of cinematographic co-productions produced between Spain and Cuba during the last decade of the twentieth century and the early twenty-first century. I will present two specific case studies—one of a narrative film, *Habana Blues* (2005), and the other a documentary, *Habana Abierta* (2002)—that illustrate the revamping of Hispano-Cuban relations through the culture industry, creating a Cuban filmic boom in Spain.

***Habana Blues* (2005)**

If Wim Wender's *Buena Vista Social Club* documented the process of recording and producing a musical collaboration between Cuban artists and foreign investors,

Benito Zambrano's film *Habana Blues* (2005) takes up a similar subject.¹ Based on the rock band Habana Abierta's experience with Spanish labels interested in producing their first album in Spain, this narrative (fictional) film tells the story of a rock group named Habana Blues in a 1990s Havana intent on getting a record deal to escape the economic hardship of Cuba's Special Period.² If its lead singers, Tito (Roberto San Martín) and Ruy (Alberto Yoel García) are desperate to score the deal, so are Martha (Marta Calvó) and Kique (Roger Pera), the Spanish label representatives who are under pressure from their label to seal the deal on this "hot, underground Cuban sound."³ As the plot develops, the exigencies of the label increase while the benefits for the artists decrease. Martha's sexual expectations from the light-eyed muscular mulatto Ruy also mount leading to an

¹ Benito Zambrano, director and screenwriter from Seville, Spain, lived in Cuba during 1992 and 1994 while he was studying film at Havana's Escuela Internacional de Cine y TV de San Antonio de los Baños. His documentary *Los que se quedaron* (1993) focuses on the families left behind by those who left Cuba during the Mariel Boatlift of 1980. He is also the director of a score of Spanish shorts and films—including the five Goya award-winning *Solas* (1998).

² I conducted interviews with both Boris Larramendi, member of Habana Abierta as well as with Pável Urkiza of the Cuban duo of Gema y Pável, responsible for the formation of Habana Abierta. Both reside in Madrid and were interviewed in spring of 2008. Both confirmed that the narrative film *Habana Blues* is based on a modified version of the story of Habana Abierta, the band, in their attempts to organize and sign with a Spanish label. Both point to the fact that the documentary *Habana Abierta* already existed by 2005 when the movie was produced and thus they suspect it contributed to the modifications. Benito Zambrano, director and screenwriter from Seville, Spain, says the script was an homage to the people of Cuba he came to know during 1992 and 1994 while he was studying film there. In a published interview on the web (http://www.primordiales.com.ar/estrenos/habana_blues.htm) Zambrano is said to have thought of the idea for *Habana Blues* while listening to a concert in Havana "de uno de los grandes de la nueva música cubana. Viéndolos a ellos, se me detonó la historia de un músico negro." Neither here nor in several other articles consulted does Zambrano mention this one group that inspired the idea to develop a script between 1994 and 1996 that led to filming in 2004. With Habana Abierta still living in Havana until 1996 when they were officially signed to the Nubenegra label, it is plausible that they were, still under the name Habana Oculta, a source of inspiration for the movie. However, the film's co-producer, Ernesto Chao, has said in an interview with *La Venta* (<http://laventana.casa.cult.cu/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=2079>) that "un concierto de Santiago Feliú, donde Gerardo Alfonso estaba invitado. Su imagen impactó a Benito, quien construyó una trama, donde el rol principal recaía en un mulato. Zambrano creó una bella historia de amor de este con una pintora rubia. Sin embargo, no quedó satisfecho y la fue arrastrando hasta que concluyó la serie de televisión *Padre coraje*."

³ Note that discovering underground artists and exploiting them has a transparent parallel to the colonial model of discovery and exploitation that fits with the arguments I make concerning a re-conquering of Cuba by Spain in a post-colonial world.

explosive scene where all the artists are reminded that complying with the Spanish label's demands was their "only ticket out of poverty." As Ruy and Tito disagree on which compromises are acceptable for them to make as individual artists, the movie speaks of the power that the global market has over Cuban musicians and the decisions they must make because, ultimately, in Martha's words "business is business." In the end, the dynamic best friend duo part ways as Tito and the other musicians manage to blackmail the producers into letting them make the album without Ruy who chooses to stay in Havana.⁴

In choosing to follow the character that does not compromise his artistic vision, the directors and screenwriters of *Habana Blues*—all of Spanish origin—follow a plot trend established in the 1990s when co-productions began to dominate Cuban cinema. Once Spain salvaged the Cuban cinematic industry, plots that concluded with protagonists being stereotypical victims of their choices to stay on the island became the norm and *Habana Blues* does not deviate from that. While Tito embarks on a potentially successful musical career in Spain, Ruy is left alone and hopeless in Cuba. His wife and children have opted to risk their lives on a raft heading to the United States and with his group having left for Spain, his opportunity to leave the island is gone. Being true to his convictions, Ruy's character loses in the game of the cultural production industry. This speaks to a Spanish perspective about the mutual needs of Cuban artists to be signed and of Spanish labels to discover them and package them for consumption. The moral of the

⁴ As is explained through dialogue in the movie, these producers were not allowed to solicit artists that were not formally recognized by the Cuban state. As underground rock musicians, their signing would result in serious penalties for other Spanish investors in the music industry mostly in the form of limited investment or termination of agreed upon signing privileges. Tito is able to use his sly cunning wit (also a stereotype of the Cuban male of the Special Period) to secure a contract for at least himself.

film seems to be that if you do not *sell* out you do not *get* out. From the migratory standpoint, Ruy's escape route has vanished because "Cubans only get one chance in the industry, one chance to fly right out of here (Havana) and they cannot afford to turn it down." He is condemned to a destitute life; this ending allows the perpetuation of the Messianic discourse turned lesson: needy artists need to be rescued by Spanish investors. It follows suit with a plot development that has played on the tenets of the colonial condition: the European investor set on conquering the mulatto artist, the irresistible sex appeal of the Cuban male for the European female and the inter-dependency model. The neo-colonial condition is similarly reified: Ruy's art conditions his migratory experience or lack thereof and conversely Tito's migratory experience conditions his art.⁵ Although the movie does not give the spectator a proleptic update on either musician's future, it can be deduced that Tito will have a better life in Madrid while Ruy will continue to struggle in Havana, suffering the Habana Blues.

The fact that *Habana Blues* was filmed and released in 2005—over a decade after the events that inspired its production occurred—speaks of a reality within the culture industry that is quite palpable well after the Special Period ends, officially in 2003. There is an evident pedagogical element lurking within this film that in the likes of others before and after it, begs two questions. First, why would Spain engage in the production of a film that portrays its culture industry as an exploitative one? I argue that in the first instance it is an act linked to imperial nostalgia where Spain uses a widely diffused cultural medium to assert its conquest of the Cuban image and via the plot of *Habana Blues*, asserts its equal control over the music industry in order to expose the vindication

⁵ Tito is signed by the label without Ruy but he must sell himself in Spain as a censored Cuban artist.

of its historical wound. The masses, on both sides of the Atlantic, are reminded that neo-colonial relationships are in working order and show no signs of decline. This, by extension, reinforces the power structure that Spain has re-established in Cuba, from the economy to its culture industry. For the Cuban diasporic community in Spain such a film highlights the realities of a people that depend on foreign investment for survival and, in the case of immigrants, escape. While artists may seem to have a metaphorical leg-up when it comes to the process of immigration because their art carries the promise of leaving Cuba, they are nonetheless immigrant subjects; Cuban artists in Spain are Cuban immigrants who practice an art. In order to do so, they have to face the same struggles and situations that other Cuban immigrants face as the lyrics of the Ruy and Tito's songs reveal throughout the film.

The second question *Habana Blues* poses from a production standpoint is the following: why would Cuba allow such discourses of soul-selling in a capitalist market (to which the Revolution is vehemently opposed) and the compromising of artistic integrity to taint both the Revolutionary project and the social function of film within it?⁶ So goes an old Cuban phrase readily heard in Havana, *por dinero baila el mono*.⁷ In the face of need—the extinction of a film industry that has served the Revolution's needs since 1959—the salvaging effort is one that can only be undertaken if Spanish visions of Cuban cinema is taken to the screen. In the case of *Habana Blues*, movie reviews published in the Cuban government-sponsored newspaper *Granma* indicate that this type

⁶ The Cuban Cinematographic Institute (ICAIC) was created at the inception of the Cuban Revolution of 1959 as a social tool that would archive the social change taking place and to serve as a learning tool for the masses. Cuban film was never a product for external consumption nor were foreign film companies allowed to co-produce films with Cuba until the Special Period.

⁷ The phrase translates to: *Monkeys will dance for money*.

of movie exalts men like Ruy as exemplary revolutionaries. His character is understood as that of a Cuban citizen who firmly asserts his agency, refusing to be devoured by the capitalist market. He teaches Cubans what it means to be a true revolutionary. While this is certainly a valid reading of Ruy's character, the true Revolutionary/artist committed to the Cuban revolutionary project would not engage in the underground sound to begin with nor would he seek an illegal record deal where he would sell himself as a silenced rebel. In choosing to highlight a filmic moral that neatly fits with the pedagogical objectives of Cuban film, the ICAIC (Cuban Film Institute) chooses to overlook the pedagogical goals that the Spanish producers clearly reveal in the movie. It is a survival tactic that has allowed Cuba's film industry to reap the benefits of commercialization while overlooking the evident lingering discourse of neo-colonialism. It is precisely this discourse and its racial and gender subtexts that will be discussed in the proceeding chapter on filmic co-production between Cuba and Spain in the 1990s.

Habaneando y Chanchaneando

Cuando las turbulencias sonoras llegan a nuestra isla siempre hay gente con talento que sabe convertirlas en brisas acústicas con sabor caribeño.⁸

⁸ *Habana Blues*, rec. Havana, Cuba 2005 Director Benito Zambrano. Maestranza Films: Spain, coproducción Pyramide Productions: France, ICAIC: Cuba.



Figure 4.1 African-American Blues musician



Figure 4.2 Habana Blues musicians Tito (Roberto San Martín) and Ruy (Alberto Yoel García), Habana Blues

Habana Blues tells the story of Ruy and Tito—two young Cuban musicians who have been orchestrating a way to make their dream come true: to have their music recognized. Far from identifying exclusively with classic Cuban rhythms or the timba sound popular amongst those of their generation, they follow the beat of their own drum—*Habaneando*, *guitarreando*, *rumbeando*, *negociando*, *pregonando*—to the rhythm of Cuban Blues. Their music is a metaphor of the transculturation that characterizes the island’s culture, as noted by Fernando Ortiz, as they fuse a southern African-American genre (the Blues) with Havana’s Afro-Cuban genres that breeds the neo-genre Habana Blues. Although this New Orleans sound is not theirs—Ned Sublette points out that “Cuban musicians don’t have the Blues”—the sentiment they express through their music surely is categorically an expression of ‘the blues.’⁹ Beyond forming part of a new

⁹ Ned Sublette. *Cuba and Its Music*. (Illinois: Chicago Review Press) 166. As per Sublette the Blues genre doesn’t naturally agree, rhythmically with Cuban music. “They (Cubans) don’t feel those minute pitch distinctions that a blues musician makes automatically, and they tend to sound a little stiff playing against swing time.” Nonetheless, Cubans were a palpable presence in New Orleans during the XIX century, as has been documented by Kirsten Silva Gruesz in *Ambassadors of Culture: The Transamerican Origins of Latino Writing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), that would have contributed to cultural (musical) exchanges. Likewise, this exchange would have been possible by the participation of African-

musical history in Cuba, Tito and Ruy's music shows traces of a poetic melody associated with Silvio Rodríguez and Pablo Milanés in the *Nueva Trova* genre of the 1970s which in the 1980s in the voice of artists like Carlos Varela became known as the *Novísima Trova*. It is a genre that adopted the Revolution's cultural objectives of transforming Cuban society into an egalitarian one that would eradicate social classes. The musical revolution of the Nueva Trova found inspiration in socio-political themes and aimed to offer an alternative to the aesthetics of commercialized music.¹⁰ This *nueva canción* reflected an ethic of social equality promulgated by national discourse thus becoming a musical discourse that spoke to the social contradictions. Like that *nueva canción*, Ruy and Tito's blues, the rock music of Habana Abierta and Orishas are able to achieve what Kenneth Bilby and Antonio-Benítez Rojo have observed as the intellectual appropriation of popular culture through which the nation is defined. If Silvio Rodríguez and his generation rescued the trova tradition of the 19th and 20th centuries as their own to fuse with the ethic of the Revolution in the Nueva Trova genre, the musicians of Habana Blues, Habana Abierta and Orishas rescue the esthetic of the Nueva Trova to further fuse it with the sounds of the blues, rock and roll, and hip-hop. In this way, they all insert themselves in the revolution's cultural project.

It is precisely the fusion of genres and discourses that are seemingly cacophonous which speak to the contradictions of Cuban society, explicitly narrated in the songs of Tito and Ruy. "Cansado," a song whose title already alludes to a feeling of

American soldiers—"Buffalo Soldiers"—in the Spanish-American War of 1898. This is documented in Edward Van Zile Scott's *The Unwept: Black American Soldiers and the Spanish-American War* (Montgomery, Ala.: 1996). See also Figure 4.1.

¹⁰ Otero Garabís 12.

disillusionment, exposes the irony of partaking in a movement that refuses to be enslaved by the U.S. dollar (*el fula*) but cannot survive on the island without it. The song makes reference to the dire economic situation on the island during the Special Period. If Castro's aim had been to eliminate American economic influence over Cuba by officially nationalizing its investments in 1960, the legal circulation of the U.S. dollar in 1993 as viable currency dismantled one of the premises of the Revolution's project that inevitably led to the incurable malady of *el jineterismo* (prostitution). Historian Richard Scott explains that the dollarization of the Cuban economy—the source of which was mostly tourism and remittances—presented the government with the realities of a black market with which the Cuban state could not compete. To minimize its effects, the dollar became Cuban's national currency as it had been for the first fifty years of the twentieth century, a clear backward movement in terms of the Revolution's ideals. Scott says,

The government opened retail stores trading in dollars to mop up any surplus on the black market that created deep divisions in Cuban society in the course of the 1990s between those with access to dollars and those without. Those with dollars became significantly wealthier than those who had none. The egalitarian ethic that had been such a proud boast of the Revolution was further undermined.¹¹

Voicing while simultaneously protesting this social reality, “Cansado” is sung by Ruy whose name is an abbreviated version of *ruiseñor*, a nightingale, a bird that is known to sing, amidst darkness, when others do not and whose song is strengthened in the midst of competing songs. As a sensual light-skinned mulatto with a weakness for women, Ruy depends as much on the black market as he does on sex tourism, rendering services to the likes of French female photographers and Spanish female record producers in exchange

¹¹ Richard Scott. *Cuba: A New History*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) 291-2.

for dollars and any promotion he can score for his music. His frustration is clearly voiced in his song,

Aquí estoy una vez más, en la esquina de este barrio con el sudor, el sexo y el tráfico de habanos entre la calle y el ron, se vive un poco agitado voy pedaleando en el tiempo hacia delante pero vuelvo al pasado, siempre al mismo lado.

Surviving in Havana, that urban space of ceaseless sounds, is a constant act of negotiation (*negociando*) between an ideology that moves forward and a reality that moves backward. This burdensome tiredness or *cansancio* is not only felt by Ruy but stands as an allegory for the Cuban people tired of a failed revolution that dismantled along with the Soviet Bloc. Dedicated to his wife, the song captures what the Cuban woman is in Ruy's eyes: she is a metaphor of Havana as she carries the cross of prostitution—of selling arts and crafts that for her have no commercial value but rather artistic value—in order to provide for her children. He sings,

Hoy, miro a través de ti, las calles de mi Habana
tu tristeza y tu dolor, reflejan sus fachadas,
es tu alma y soledad, la voz, la voz de esta nación
cansada

Solos tú y yo, en la ciudad dormida
solos tú y yo, besando las heridas
¡Ay Habana!

Paradoxical in that it dreams yet has nightmares, the city is asleep. Hurt, it will awaken to the magic kiss that will cure it of all its maladies—the optimism of revolutionaries, tired but not defeated. Nonetheless for Caridad (which literally means charity) and later for Tito this promise of a bright future never comes to fruition; it is only by leaving the homeland, she for Miami and Tito for Madrid that the promise of Paradise is kept. Havana becomes for them what it is for Andy García—the lost city. Living the daily

workings of a contradictory existence imagined by the state and felt by the national subject, Ruy concludes his song of protest with *the blues*:

tengo que dejarte ir, poniendo el mar entre los dos
pagando el precio de otros que viven de la contradicción,
otra familia que quedó marcada por la separación
como luchar, con ese sol con la política y con dios

Likewise, “Habaneando,” the lead song of the movie’s soundtrack and the title given to the album produced by the artists in the film, criticizes the socio-economic situation in Cuba but does not hesitate to state that fighting for the ideals that guide the tired nation is of utmost importance:

El sistema aprieta y no quiere ceder
y la bolsa negra llega resolver lo justo
detrás de esa fachada tan turística que ves de Cuba en un cartel
hay un obrero todo el puto día dando luz y ser
tú sabes... la isla no es solo ron y tabaco, putas, Varadero, cayo Largo
no solo es eso, hay gente que pasa todo el día trabajando, de sol a sol
por un futuro mejor, así que vamos

Although there is a clear questioning of why the present is condemned to be as it is, there is no attempt to question its root—loyalty to a failed system that takes its people’s loyalties but doesn’t give much in return, except the promise of a better tomorrow that never comes into being. Ruy is the voice of the nation’s tragic hero who, as Rafael Rojas explains, assumes his role in an apocalyptic and prophetic national narrative that renders his fate an enigma and an impossibility.¹² That fate is impossible to obtain because it is based on a contradictory temporality where, in the words of Castro, it is history which will absolve the loyal Cuban revolutionary who fights for the ideals of the Revolution in

¹² Rafael Rojas. *Isla sin fin*. (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1998) 37.

the present.¹³ In this way, “History will absolve me” becomes another motto of the Revolution, found in Habana Abierta’s “Divino Guión,” where history guides the Revolutionary project and that project simultaneously guides history. As explained by José Quiroga, “In Fidel’s words ‘history’ foreshadowed an event that was never going to happen: a time outside of time, a future where ‘history would come to judge the nation.’”¹⁴ For this reason, in the island that repeats itself, the present progressive is the only tense that can characterize the Cuban nation and the attitude of the *Hombre Nuevo*, the *New Man* that is the product of this Revolution. Ruy and Tito as artists can only exist in a state of *habaneando*, *pregonando*, *negociando*, *rumbeando*, because they are stuck in a present that is continuous, as the use of the gerund indicates, that seems to progress into that promised future but is stifled in the present.

Tito and Ruy, however, are saved from the monotony of the never ending present, the never attained future when representatives from a Spanish record label discovers their music and are intent on signing them to their company. The music industry thus serves as a battleground for the sense of nationalism and artistic integrity against the demands of the market of cultural production. If Ruy sings about a dream come true, “*ahora suena el rock and roll con el ritmo de este son y se cambió la situación con el viento a mi favor*,” the mood of his tune is quickly plagued by the blues when he is thrust into the world of negotiating his art with *los españoles* as they are known throughout the film. According to Theodor Adorno, the culture industry does not consist solely of the means of cultural production and communication with the masses but also of the dominant class who

¹³ Castro proclaimed “History will absolve me” following the attack to the Moncada Barracks in 1953 which was the initial step in the Revolution that would start in 1959.

¹⁴ José Quiroga. *Cuban Palimpsests*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005) 28-9.

control the means and the industry itself. It is here that the power relations I am arguing for between Spain and Cuba become most evident. It is through the industry of cultural production that Cuban artists are subject to the power of investment. This is how they become privy to the demands of the market, whose consumers will make the investment a profitable one if they continue to like what they see and hear, the product that is packaged and marketed for their consumption. This new power that Spain has is an imperial one that colonizes the Cuban culture industry thus re-inserting itself in a history between Cuba and Spain that unlike 1898 renders Spain victorious. It is through the industry of cultural production that Spain re-inserts itself in the narrative of an omnipotent, messianic nation who salvages its memory of defeat by re-conquering the most prized of colonies lost. For Tito and Ruy, being subjected to the whims and exigencies of the label's representatives serves to highlight the challenges faced by a Cuba that sells itself, *se jinetea*, to foreign investors; it reveals the paradoxical story of an island determined to uphold its stance against capitalism of the American kind but willing to welcome and sell itself to capitalism of the European kind that re-established a neo-colonial condition with the Motherland. When Marta, the Catalan representative of the Madrid label offers the musicians a contract that most of them refuse, it is a microcosmic representation of the economic pacts between island and metropolis. In the same way that Cuba must be grateful for Spain's helping hand in times of need, so must the artists who are promised contracts, careers and ultimately an escape route from an ailing Cuba gracefully accept what is given them, no matter how unreasonable. In Marta's own words:

Si fuerais músicos con un proyecto importante seguro que me lo tirabais en la cara pero teniendo en cuenta el punto en que estáis creo que es razonable. Bajo el contrato la compañía tiene exclusiva de todo lo que hagáis y nada, repito, nada se hará sin el consentimiento de la compañía.

Músico: ¿Entonces, la grabación del disco la pagamos nosotros?

Marta: Pues claro.

Tito: El que no quiere que lo exploten que no firme. Tenemos que estar claro, nosotros dependemos de ellos, ellos no dependen de nosotros.¹⁵

Tito articulates this relation of dependence which he and many artists see as unidirectional. I would argue that in light of Spain's fixation on Cuba, on the historic wound of 1898 that once and for all dismantled Spain's identity as imperial power, finds a cure in the 1990s. Spain, able and willing to save Cuba, depends on the conditions and needs born of the Special Period and its proliferating pool of forbidden artists waiting to be packaged for consumption to restore its lost glory as primary investor and the undisputed ruling hand in Cuba's culture industry. It is the repeating of colonial history that now takes the stage through cultural production. Tito's reflection hints at anti-nationalist sentiment because in recognizing the dependence on Spain for a brighter future, it the capitalist world and the working of the music industry within it that makes the future a possibility and not the Revolution's projected future that seems to never arrive. This seemingly harsh criticism is smoothed over with *el choteo*, what Jorge Mañach called a Cuban cultural strategy to make light of, through mockery and laughter, of everything that is of a serious nature.¹⁶ *Choteando* or making fun of the typical image of meetings held by the CDRs—Committees for the Defense of the Revolution—in Cuban movies such as *De cierta manera* (1978), *Retrato de Teresa* (1979), and *Hasta cierto punto* (1983), the members of the band recreate one of these inclusive circles to discuss the contract. It is Marta who signals whose turn it is to speak, one by one, as if

¹⁵ Habana Blues.

¹⁶ Jorge Mañach. *Indagación del choteo*. (Barcelona: Linkgua Ediciones: 2009).

she were leading her own music themed CDR meeting. Gorky—the rocker whose name recalls that of the writer and cultural spokesperson of Stalin’s Russia known to destroy what needed to be destroyed—takes over the discussion. In a sarcastic tone that reverts to Cuban *choteo*, he questions the generosity of Spain and hints at the performativity that lies behind being a member of revolution.

Gorky: Oye asere, ¡te la venden con grasa y protestas porque resbala!

Músico: Saben exactamente la situación que tenemos y se están aprovechando.

Gorky (a Ruy): ¿Qué le parece el generoso contrato de los hermanos españoles?

Ruy: Es mejor que nada.

Gorky: Jefa, le falta entusiasmo. Tiene que ensayar más. ¿El compañero pudiera explicar las razones por su falta de entusiasmo?

This allegorical disagreement helps to expose the myth of unconditional support from the people toward the bilateral agreements made between their leaders. Nonetheless it provides Ruy the opportunity to defend the nation and Cuban art, voicing the true worth of both and condemning foreign exploitation. He says,

No somos ningunos muertos de hambre, bróder. Bueno, hambre tenemos pero me como un ladrillo antes que su compañía se llene los bolsillos a costa mía. He traicionado a mucha gente, incluso a mí mismo pero mi música no. Es lo único verdadero que tengo.

As if his music were his ideology, the set of ideals to which he owed his loyalty, he opts to defend it against their abusive expectations even if it means that he must continue to struggle in the Cuban present progressive and not in the Madrilian future. He concludes that other producers will shortly come with a better and more decent offer and they will be able to move forward, *salir adelante*. Tito, whose fixation is on leaving the island and whose commitment to the nationalist project is clearly minimal, cannot forgive Ruy’s

defiant dismissal of the offer. What ensues is a heated argument between Ruy who is unwilling to sell out to the industry and Tito who sees it as a mere sacrifice in order to make a name for themselves and leave the island. As artistic integrity and artistic desperation go head to head, both racism and machismo enter the equation, shattering the silence of the myth of equality.

Tito: Los que triunfaron los hicieron...porque aprovecharon su oportunidad. En este país o triunfas o te mueres, **mulato de mierda**.

Ruy: Hay algo peor que ser un mulato de mierda, ser **un par de putas**, asere. Esos gallegos son unos vampiros y nos iban a chupar la sangre.

Tito: Pero estaríamos en España, **maricón**.

Ruy: Seríamos esclavos de los gallegos de pinga esos.

Tito: Y aquí, ¿de quién somos esclavos?

Ruy: De nadie. De nosotros mismos.

Tito: Tengo 28 años y nunca he salido de esta **puta** isla. Yo me quiero ir... pero no solo, pinga, cojones. Hace un mes estamos chupándole el culo a los gallegos de pinga y lo jodes. Vete pa la pinga **negro maricón**. (My emphasis)

As they exchange considerably offensive phrases from a 'manly' urban street culture lexicon Ruy quickly loses his brother status in Tito's eyes to quickly become a racialized and sexualized Cuban, like any other, who deserves to be the object of pejorative scorn. For Tito, Ruy has lost his manliness or *hombría*, because a man defies the vicious cycle of waiting for the promised future that never arrives by proactively seeking a solution to the cycle. A feminine man or a homosexual as he outright calls him is the one who lives a fantasy, a delusion or *pajas mentales* (mental masturbations) about tomorrow, instead of making a change today to ensure a different tomorrow. As a white Cuban who is cast as the grandson of a famous bolero singer, Tito reveals a residual racism and classism that predates Castro's Cuba. By first calling Ruy *un mulato ruin*, a ruined and ruinous biracial

man and later and perhaps more serious in Castro's Cuba, *un negro afeminado*, a feminine black man or black homosexual, Tito reminds Ruy that the nation Ruy defends is still fragmented and that Ruy is amongst those who bear the brunt of marginalization.¹⁷ Conscious of this silenced reality, it is Ruy who composes a song whose chorus says, "*Todos los negros finos nos hemos reunido y hemos decidido no tocar más rumba*," to distinguish himself from the rest of the bunch—the black Cubans.¹⁸ As he breaks with the stereotype, the expected, and produced a music other than rumba, guaguancó, son, timba, hip-hop, he casts himself as a refined black Cuban, a Cuban with cultural capital who knows about other musical forms foreign to most Cuban artists and is capable of making it; he simply lacks the means or economic capital to make it a commercial success. He too, depends on the capitalist industry to have his music, his art, refined or not, heard. As the movie comes to a close Ruy dedicates the concert held in Havana to reclaiming the right to dream of utopias, ones where art need not be compromised by a market of supply and demand.

If Tito finds his utopia—escaping insularity—he is only to do so by being a sell out or a *vende patria*. He must give in to the demands of the music industry which is

¹⁷ The threat that the homosexual Cuban male creates for Castro's Revolution and the resulting marginalization of the male homosexual has been the topic of much scholarly work including Ian Lumsden's *Machos, Maricones and Gays* (Temple University Press: 1996) and Emilio Bejel's *Gay Cuban Nation* (University of Chicago Press: 2001). The latter is especially relevant for the quarrel between Tito and Ruy in this scene as it reflects Bejel's observation that homosexuality has always haunted Cuban national discourse and it is specifically mentioned by Tito as an offensive although non-literal way to reiterate Ruy's marked displacement within that discourse. Néstor Almendros's and Orlando Jiménez Leal's 1984 documentary *Improper Conduct* addresses the imprisonment of homosexuals in Cuban concentration camps.

¹⁸ "Superfinos negros" is the title of this song composed and performed by the Afro-Cuban hip hop group Free Hole Negro. For a detailed discussion about the importance of this song for new expressions of racial inequality in Cuba, reference Odette Casamayor-Cisneros's article entitled "Todos los negros finos hemos decidido." "...". *Revista Encuentro* (2009). See electronic version <http://www.cubaencuentro.com/revista/revista-encuentro/archivo/53-54-verano-otono-2009/todos-los-negros-finos-hemos-decidido-250582>

synonymous with the selling out of Cuba to the market of cultural production. For this reason, when the duo goes to the radio station to promote their new single, Tito confirms “*Esto es pa’ hoy, yo no quiero que me descubran a los 90.*” He makes a clear if indirect reference to the Wim Wenders’s ‘discovery’ of the Buena Vista Social Club that led to the 1997 documentary and a world tour of the octogenarian musicians whose music belongs to the Golden Era of Cuban music. As musicologist Cristóbal Díaz-Ayala explains, these *trovadores*, musicians of the son, danzón and bolero genres whose music was heard in Havana’s social club named Buena Vista were never seen as anything but reminders of a pre-Castro Cuba which the Revolution was intent on erasing.¹⁹ These artists were silenced for decades as other rhythms took the stage in representing the Cuban sound, more notably the modern *charanga*, *timba*, and most recently *Cubatón* (Cuban reggeatón). Buena Vista was only to be re-heard in light of the Special Period when the business of nostalgia became a lucrative one for an island that (technically) survived both the Cold War and the U.S.–imposed embargo.²⁰ The musical reunion made

¹⁹ Cristóbal Díaz-Ayala. *Música cubana del areyto al rap cubano*. (Puerto Rico: Fundación Musicalia, 2003), 16.

²⁰ In 1996, American guitarist Ry Cooder had been invited to Havana by British world music producer Nick Gold of World Circuit Records to record a session where two African High-life musicians from Mali were to collaborate with Cuban musicians. On Cooder's arrival (via Mexico to avoid the ongoing U.S. trade and travel embargo against Cuba), it transpired that the musicians from Africa had not received their visas and were unable to travel to Havana. Cooder and Gold changed their plans and decided to record an album of Cuban son music with local musicians. Already on board the African collaboration project were Cuban musicians including bassist Orlando "Cachaito" López, guitarist Eliades Ochoa and musical director Juan de Marcos González, who had himself been organizing a similar project for the Afro-Cuban All Stars. A search for additional musicians led the team to singer Manuel "Puntillita" Licea, pianist Rubén González and octogenarian singer Compay Segundo, who all agreed to record for the project. Within three days of the project's birth, Cooder, Gold and de Marcos had organized a large group of performers and arranged for recording sessions to commence at Havana's EGREM Studios, formerly owned by RCA records, where the equipment and atmosphere had remained unchanged since the 1950s. Communication between the Spanish and English speakers at the studio was conducted via an interpreter, although Cooder reflected that "musicians understand each other through means other than speaking".

The album was recorded in just six days and contained fourteen tracks; opening with "Chan Chan" written by Compay Segundo, a four chord son that was to become what Cooder described as "the Buena Vista's

possible by American guitarist Ry Cooder re-constructed a typical septet of the 1940s era that took the music world back in time instead of portraying real time in Cuba insofar as musical production is concerned, engaging in a hegemonic practice of dismantling and resemanticizing popular culture for profit. Grammy in hand by the end of the decade proved the effectiveness of such a practice and the market to consume it. The 1997 British produced Buena Vista Social Club World Circuit/Nonesuch Records album led by Ry Cooder is the biggest-selling world music album ever, with more than eight million records having been sold in the 10+ years since its release.²¹ Contradictory in its opposition to the national project, it was the government-sponsored label Egrem which released the Buena Vista CD in Cuba and the Buena Vista documentary was filmed in conjunction with the government sponsored Cuban Film Institute, ICAIC. It is obvious that the project of rescuing musical memory proved more lucrative and *business is business*. Ironically the Buena Vista phenomenon shows how it is not the *Hombre Nuevo*, resolute on defending Cuba and all things Cuban against the maladies of capitalism, but *El Hombre Viejo* who plays into the workings of a capitalist industry of cultural production who salvages the Cuban economy.

Habana Blues takes this fever for investment in Cuban music to the movie screen as does the 2002 *Habana Abierta* documentary. Available on CD, DVD, and via the Internet, the distribution of these musical cultural products coincides with the Latin boom

calling card"; and ending with a rendition of "La Bayamesa", a traditional Cuban patriotic song (not to be confused with the Cuban national anthem of the same name). The sessions also produced material for the subsequent release, *Introducing... Rubén González*, which showcased the work of the Cuban pianist.

²¹ <http://www.nonesuch.com/artists/buena-vista-social-club>

that can be analyzed within the context of globalization. For Walter Mignolo, the sparked interest in all things Latin is a direct result of globalization where economic forces create massive movements of capital, immigration and cultural exchanges via media sources.²² It is both globalization and capitalism which not only allow Cuba and its culture to reach other corners of the world but for world cultures and their influences to seep into Cuba as well. During the Special Period, it is music which serves a space for cultural encounters and musicians such as those featured in *Habana Blues* become what Alan West-Durán calls “Active agents in the generation of transnationalism.”²³ To these contributions I add the enchantment of ‘discovering’ exactly what has been culturally brewing in Cuba for the past forty years. If the embargo enhanced the allure of the unattainable, forbidden Cuba, it was the Special Period and a sense of Spain as a new nation, enabled by a sense of imperial nostalgia that made that conquest of Cuban arts and its subsequent market of consumers a reality. *Habana Blues* speaks to the workings of this so-called Columbus effect, described by Wilson Valentín-Escobar as a discovery followed by an appropriation, to which Cuban artists were subjected as Spanish record labels and film companies flooded the island in the 1990s and well into the first years of the twenty first century.²⁴ If Ry Cooder and Wim Wenders had brought the Columbus effect into plain view through the Buena Vista Social Club documentary, reinscribing Ibrahim Ferrer, Omara Portuondo and Compay Segundo as colonized subjects, *Habana Blues* did the same for Tito and Ruy (but in the realm of narrative or fiction film). Tito expresses his

²² Walter Mignolo. *The Idea of Latin America*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), Introduction.

²³ Alan West Durán as quoted in Damián Fernández, *Cuba Transnational*. (Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 2004), Introduction.

²⁴ Wilson Valentín-Escobar.

frustration as a Cuban artist plagued by this reality, after listening to the conditions imposed by the Miami-based recording label that will finance their project (in itself problematic) via Madrid,

Quieren vendernos como músicos prohibidos. Lo de siempre--quieren que lleguemos y digamos que aquí no nos dejan tocar. Hablamos un poco de mierda, hacemos un par de entrevistas y nos hacemos famosos... Esto es sálvese quién pueda, man que el barco se hunde.”

It is evident that not only can the Miami ban on funding and signing Cuban artists be circumvented by pulling Spain into the equation but that Cuban artists would be willing to overlook the circumvention, selling out to the enemy investor. The DJ who finds the Spanish investors for Tito and Ruy clearly tells the young musicians that Marta and Lorenzo are: “*Los productores españoles de rock más importantes de los 90 con tremendo respaldo y sonido en Estados Unidos. Están buscando grabar un disco y hacer una gira por España con un grupo cubano más underground.*” Later, it becomes evident that in order to truly please both the backers and the market, the band has to be composed of Cuban musicians but they are asked to tweak their songs to replace ‘local’ elements where possible, making those more universal and marketable as world music. Ruy’s brother in the film, who is a guitar player and composer, reminds Marta and by extension the label that they are working with and expecting production from Cuban artists who produce Cuban art. It is Tito, set in his Machiavellian ways, who says that selling records is the primary objective for the time being.

Tito: Mi hermano esto es simple. Hay que venderlo y para venderlo hay que entenderlo y para entenderlo hay que cambiarlo. ¿Cuál es el problema?

Hermano: Lo que hay que entender es que la música que hacemos nosotros no tiene nada que ver con dos o tres truquitos de esos baratos para vender unos discos en España.

Marta: Que quede clarito. Estamos haciendo un disco con calidad. Somos los primeros interesados en esto pero tenemos que tener muy claro al público que va dirigido. Esto es un negocio. *Business es Business.*²⁵

Marta closes this friendly reminder with the words, “*los de Miami son los que mandan.*”

Thanks to the fictive nature of film, Tito and Ruy are allowed to express what the protagonists of the *Habana Abierta* documentary are unable to express—a dependency on the acceptance or rejection of the Miami market. The dialogue that ensues between Tito and the male producer, Lorenzo, reveals an the inevitable tension, in the industry, amongst the players in the market, most notably the Cubans *over there* and those *here* on the island.

Lorenzo: Allí (en Miami) hay gente que está interesada en vosotros.

Tito: No joda compadre que esa gente no quiere na’ con nosotros.

Lorenzo: Cuando hay posibilidades de *money* la gente se olvida de los peces de colores, ya know?

The rampant disregard for an artist’s integrity and on a larger scale, ideological loyalty, is a trace of the expected *jineterismo* of cultural products in the music industry for artists of the Special Period. The seed of discord is planted as artists are asked to sacrifice a worldview, an understanding of the artist and his art in order to make a profit. In order to succeed, to eliminate the burden of a future that never arrives, compromise becomes the

²⁵ In its own way, the Cuban government facilitates such business transactions, establishing an annual international music fair, *Cubadisco*, that with fourteen categories—rock and pop included—attracts labels across the world to discover Cuban artists. Ry Cooder is the prime example of an American who produced the Buena Vista documentary under a British label.

only viable option. Lorenzo, cognizant of both the tensions that exist and the repercussions accepting such a contract entails, is nonetheless quick to absolve the Spaniards of the label of culpability. As if Spain were merely the messenger, he says, “*No somos culpables de los líos que os traéis entre los cubanos de aquí y los de allí. Se arriesgan. De todas formas, aunque sea, salen de aquí.*” What seems a fairly innocent statement is actually laden with one of the primary characteristics of imperial nostalgia—the white man’s burden. In his essay entitled “Imperial Nostalgia,” Renato Rosaldo says that “imperialist nostalgia uses a pose of ‘innocent yearning’ both to capture people’s imaginations and to conceal its complicity with often brutal domination.”²⁶ By highlighting the risky yet coveted escape route, Lorenzo yearns for some of the artists’ aid, deemphasizing the excessive control of artistic freedom that the proposed contract entails. Lorenzo is in essence saying that they, as Spaniards and representatives of the culture industry, are not responsible for the history between Cuba and the United States that stifles their musical careers. Nonetheless, they, Spaniards, the Spanish culture industry, are there to ensure that at the very least these repressed artists escape from their bleak professional future on the island. It is not the Spanish man’s burden to fix the ills of history when it comes to Cuban-American relations but it is his burden to ensure that his own history reflects the responsibility or better yet credit for the salvaging of these talented musician’s careers. In this way, Spain facilitates the exit of Cuban artists via Europe to later help market them in the United States, reminding artists that ideologies, loyalties and art are negotiated as they go along. Thus, business is business translates to

²⁶ Renato Rosaldo . “Imperial Nostalgia.” *Representations*. Special Issue: *Memory and Counter-Memory* No. 26, (Spring, 1989), 107-122.

Business is negotiating politics. Agency and artistic autonomy is not so much threatened by the industry or its demands as it is by the agendas that those with the investment and distribution power be it in Cuba, Miami or Madrid. Ruy opts not to negotiate in a business whose business goes beyond the tenants of a contract to encompass a struggle of the inextricable link between politics and art. In his words,

Ruy: Asere, no me hace ninguna gracia esto de andar por ahí hablando mierda de esto. Somos músicos hermano, qué coño nos importa la política. No es lo mismo salir fuera sabiendo que no vas a volver. Si nos contratan es por la música que hacemos no por unos singaos que no saben ni pinga de lo que está pasando en este país.

Ruy not only disidentifies with the culture of selling your artistic soul to the industry, he wholeheartedly defends art in its purest state. Far from being the caricature of a decaying and evasive artist as Bourdieu sees the ‘pure artist,’ Ruy fights against domination of his art by the industry of musical production, openly voicing his discontent with the inequality that exists between artist, producers and the investors who dictate the norms of the industry. When Tito suggests that Ruy stay at a beach house with Marta in the hopes of having his sexual charm influence the stipulations of the contract, Ruy reminds audiences of his utter disgust for the buy-and-sell-services game—in all its forms—saying, “*Asere, esto está cuadrao ya. Que se busquen a otro pa’ divertirse.*”

Ruy’s resolute stance shows that individual cultural production can have a strained relationship with the industry of cultural production but it is not all set in stone. Juan Otero Garabís explains that in popular culture, the industry may have the capital and the means of production at their fingertips but it does not guarantee the power to control

or homogenize artists or public interest for those artists.²⁷ If Cuba has been known for *el son, el danzón, la guaracha, la trova, el guaguancó* and *la timba*, there is room for artists to make Cuba known for *the blues, rock and roll, and hip-hop*. *Habana Blues*, as a film about young artists who set out to create an art that is as Cuban as any art form that is legitimized by the state or labeled authentic Cuban by an industry, and the *Habana Abierta* documentary show that there is room for negotiation although it may not have a lucrative outcome as is the case for Ruy. Cuban artists in their quotidian living cross borders, push the limits of art forms without there necessarily being mediation or censure be it from the government or foreign record labels. Before the Spanish producers arrive in Havana, Tito and Ruy had made Tito's grandmother's apartment bathroom into a provisional recording studio. A young Cuban rocker with a John Lennon look served as the recording technician with the limited equipment they had access to and with Ruy's charm, they managed to have a French photographer friend shoot the cover of their first single. It is obvious that they exerted control over their impromptu industry, finding ways to record and promote their music albeit on such a minute scale that is no different from artists recording their songs on home-made tapes and selling them in the streets of New York City during the 1980s or in a more contemporary sense, selling their CDs in any other city in the world. As Otero Garabís explains, the means of cultural production can be used by subordinate sectors to reproduce works that are outside the reach of the industry itself.²⁸ The concert that Tito and Ruy hold in Havana at the end of the movie is made possible by the grain of salt that various people—the former keeper of an

²⁷ Juan Otero Garabís. *Nación y ritmo: "descargas" desde el Caribe*. (San Juan: Ediciones Callejón, 2000) 23.

²⁸ *Ibid* 27.

abandoned theatre, a transvesti who works as a cabaret artist and Tito's grandmother's help—contribute in an act of *socio-lismo* to the local artist.²⁹ The prediction that without the economic capital put up by *los gallegos*, i.e. the Spanish producers there would be no Tito and Ruy concert in Havana is refuted. It is only when the industry and its demands enter the storyline that the possibility of maintaining the purity of the art form is threatened.

The scene that follows the heated debate between producers and artists is a family one that recreates a last supper similar to that in Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's movie by the same name where the theme of art and its purity continues to dominate the discourse. A dinner party in honor of Ruy's family who will leave the island by raft, it is a meeting of artists—poets, musicians, singers—all friends of the troubled couple who discuss the topic of the artist who is loyal to his vision, *el artista puro*. Ruy's brother confesses he is not in this category, saying the needs of the market take precedence over his artistic vision, a plot twist given his sassy response to the producers a scene earlier. He even quotes Marta in his statement. A poet's wife who is expecting is quick to offer a rebuttal, unwilling to accept artists who sell out to the consumer.

Hermano: El artista tiene que pensar en lo que le gusta al público. Business es business. El artista puro ha muerto.

Escultora: No, mejor, hay que matarlo.

Novia de escultora: Bueno, brindemos por eso entonces. Por el artista muerto.

²⁹ *Socio-lismo* is a word born of the Cuban *choteo* earlier explained. It changes the original word *socialismo*, which refers to the political system, into a word that reflects the networking amongst Cubans who are socios or friends/allies in the daily struggle for survival. It is thus an unofficial “system” of friendly cooperation amongst Cubans. The term was first used in popular culture in Leon Ichaso's 1996 movie *Azúcar Amarga*.

Esposa: ¡Qué coño voy a brindar por eso! ¡Llevo catorce años aguantando a éste y a todas sus majaderías de poeta! ... Tú vas a seguir siendo mi poeta maldito y no le vas a hacer caso a esta escoria que se ha vendido al capitalismo...! ¡El artista puro aún vive!

La china: Brindemos por el artista puro, puro incuestionable de esta humanidad desorientada.

The loyalty that is lauded in this cheer resonates with what Bourdieu calls a “popular aesthetic based on the affirmation of continuity between art and life and a deep-rooted demand for participation.”³⁰ Part of that participation is keeping art alive for the sheer love of art, for its value and not just participating in an industry willing to invest in its continued production with strings attached.

Habana Abierta Documented



Figure 4.3 Habana Abierta sitting at Havana’s Malecón (documentary image)

If *Buena Vista* documented the process of filming and producing a musical collaboration between artists of the traditional Cuban style and their triumphant return to the island after a famed tour through both American and European stages, *Habana Blues* takes up the topic of musical production on the island in dialogue with foreign investment

³⁰ Pierre Bourdieu. *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) 32.

on two continents. The *Habana Abierta* documentary (2002) in turn focuses on the return of eight musicians—Vanito Brown, Luis Barbería, Jose Luis Medina, Alejandro Gutiérrez, Boris Larramendi, Kelvis Ochoa, Pepe del Valle, and Andy Villalón—a decade after their migration was propelled by the culture industry itself.³¹ The documentary genre takes raw footage, reality captured in an instant, to consumers. Through interviews and unscripted takes that go un-edited compared to the standards of editing fictive film, it is a media source that is seen as educational. According to Michael Chanan, “the documentary genre and its *imperfect cinema* were key in the Revolution’s process and the formation of the ICAIC as it captured the immediacy of social change that affirms the screen as a site of encounter with social reality.”³² Documenting *Habana Abierta*’s return to Cuba certainly speaks to the state-sponsored acceptance of artists who chose the path of commercialization, the route of immigration to help put Cuba and its culture on the map and a recurring point of interest for investors in the island’s culture industry.

Opening the documentary with the song “Ahora sí tengo la llave,” the producers of *Habana Abierta* confirm that this alternative rock band has opened the doors of their birth city to a musical sound that although rooted in a Cuban culture has evolved to represent a universal one. Their key to success has been partaking in the trans-Atlantic voyage into the Spanish diaspora, in knowing how to balance loyalty to a Cuban sound

³¹ Kelvis Ochoa left the group shortly after the documentary was filmed and began a solo career based in Cuba. Along with Cuban musician Descemer Bueno he won both Spain’s 2006 Goya and the 2006 “Premio de la Musica of the best movie soundtrack” for *Habana Blues*. Ochoa played the role of himself as a musician in *Habana Blues*.

³² Michael Chanan. *The Cuban Cinema*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004) 19.

while keeping production companies interested in a local sound fused with the global. The first sequences of the documentary follow the members of the group to Havana's Parque Lennon. Popularly known as Parque Rockeros, it is here that the singers reminisce about their youth in Cuba's capital city and begin to mentally prepare for their first performance on the island at the Yara Theater. Between sips of famed Cuban rum, they revert to the Cuban *choteo* as they begin to ask silly questions of the bronze Lennon statue—from the staple *¿Que bolá mi hermano?* to Does he like the Caribbean? Is it too hot for him in Cuba? They also point out that he is in la “cuna del guaguancó,” the birthplace of an Afro-Cuban rhythm. It's ironic that as artists who have appropriated a foreign musical genre they should choose to remind the foreigner (although a statue) that he is now in their musical space. In an act associated with an Afro-Cuban tradition of offering some rum to the spirits of the dead when drinking, done in santería rituals as well, some rum is drizzled in front of Lennon, showing an almost pious veneration for the English rock legend, a symbol of rebellious youth. The park erected in honor of the former Beatle being featured in the documentary seemed unlikely as it almost seems to be a place of inspiration for Habana Abierta when only a decade earlier, as Ernesto Castellanos explains, rock music “along with mini-skirts, long hair and English were locked in the same box. And the key was thrown away.”³³ *Habana Abierta* has found that discarded key and re-opens what was once considered a Pandora's box of cultural dissidence that recalls the rocker brother in the 1996 film *Azúcar Amarga* whose affinity for the music and its culture led him to inject himself with HIV-infected blood to escape

³³ Excerpt from the book *John Lennon In Havana With A Little Help From My Friends*, by Ernesto Juan Castellanos, edited by Ediciones Unión, Havana, 2005.

<http://www.cubanow.net/global/loader.php?&secc=4&item=1063&cont=show.php>

persecution by authorities. They are only able to do so upon returning to Havana, the result of the boomerang effect they sing about in their 2006 production with the same name. By leaving Cuba they made a name for Cuba and allowed future music labels to return to discover more Cuban talent. Their musical productions—true to the social realism in the Nueva Trova genre—show they can be rockers and revolutionaries from a distance and have the key to opening the doors of their city upon returning. As the song “Divino Guión” or Divine Script says,

En el muro de la Habana soy pionero por el comunismo
 Con ilusión de cosmonauta... Martí fijó la pauta
 El elefante tiene una memoria que te aplasta,
 Yo no me fui me alejé un poquito,
 Que rico es el rock con timba,
 Habana Abierta tiene un pare de (coro del público ¡Pinga!)

Finding a balance between the transculturalism in the *nueva canción*, between the political gesture without a journalist’s approach, between the memory of the past and the present, between rock and timba, these young rebels seem to use their music to express a rebellion that seeks to even the score with this allegorical Divine script. They sing,

Los de derecha giran a la derecha.
 Los de izquierda a la izquierda.
 Y ya yo me aburrí de estos viejos viajecitos en círculos.
 Yo viajo recto aunque no soy flecha.
 Yo te lo firmo y le pongo fecha por si hay sospecha.

Intent on steering clear of political binaries, their only policy is to not adopt a political perspective in their music without forgetting to narrate life in Cuba as they felt and lived it and as they perceive it from the diaspora. In the likes of the rock singer Carlos Varela, who is interviewed in the documentary, the musicians who make up Habana Abierta

belong to a generation that can critique the reality of Special Period Cuba—the material necessities, the political games, the ideological contradictions—without compromising their support for the principles of Castro’s revolution and socialism. It is a matter of agreement with the theory behind such a system but not its materialization in practice. As Athanay sings in his song “La ida y la vuelta,” the circular motion of coming and going, of the trans-Atlantic, as it pertains to musical production, the industry, Cuba, and the band’s members as diasporic subjects, it is a movement that *marea pero encanta*—it causes physical discomfort (dizzy spells) but is pleasurable.

The directors and producers of the documentary were able to capture the spontaneity of the concert despite limited material accommodations for that awaited concert of great magnitude. With a homogenizing discourse evident throughout the hour of taping, all the Cuban artists interviewed expressed unconditional support for projects in the arts that would uphold the *vaivén*, the coming and going, the flow of the global through the doors of a local Havana. It seems to mirror the thoughts expressed in the 2001 documentary *Great Day in Havana* which served as propaganda for international investors to seek artists in Cuba more than for the lucrative benefits for the parties involved in order to enrich Cuba and its culture with doses of the foreign. Interestingly enough it is Jorge Perugorría who ends the documentary with the affirmation, “*Cuba es un país muy digno y sus artistas muy cultos para prostituirse.*”

Whether or not Cuban artists compromise their artistic projects in an act of prostitution as Perugorría suggests, what is evident is that there is a market for Cuban sound and Cuban sound in image in the industry of cultural production. It is a profitable one in which Spain has exerted visible messianic control in light of Cuba’s Special Period

and its own economic protagonism on the world circuit. It is a power relation laden with expectations as *Habana Blues* suggests and the promise of change, of greater acceptance for contestatory cultural forms on the island through the hand of foreign investment as the *Habana Abierta* documentary suggests. Thus, film allows a visual space for Cubans to negotiate their artistic identity and relations with Spain/the Spanish market. What follows is a glimpse at how a Cuban artist, Alexis Valdés, uses the narrative filmic medium to co-produce his own visual space for and about the Cuban diaspora in Madrid in *Un rey en la Habana* (2005).

**Chapter 5. Of What Was Reclaimed in Havana:
Vestiges of Imperial Nostalgia in Alexis Valdes's *Un rey en la Habana***

Antonio Benítez Rojo has argued for the existence of Cuba as a repeating island and the return of Spaniards to Cuba—as tourists and subsequently as investors fueling a downtrodden economy during the Special Period—seems to confirm this theory. At a time when the Soviet Union had been dismantled and Cuba had lost its primary economic ally, the 1990s mark a time of economic need that coincides with Spain's presence on the international scene as a potent political and economic force. Having joined the European Union in 1986 and subsequently enjoying the Olympic boom of 1992, Spain found in Cuba—destitute and unallied—an anchor for investment that spanned from a booming hotel industry to popular culture. The culture industry, and particularly film production, was especially affected by the Special Period as basic materials necessary for filming were unavailable. Faced with the possibility of extinction, the Cuban Cinema Institute (the ICAIC), was forced to revisit its staunchly nationalist mode of production. Established in 1959, the Institute reaffirmed cinema's prominence as a space for discourses on the nation, politics, race and gender. As Michael Chanan argues, film had a pedagogical objective within the new Revolutionary state and in keeping with those objectives, Cuban cinema was to be kept strictly Cuban—Cuban themes, Cuban actors,

Cuban directors, and Cuban producers.¹ However, in light of the Special Period, those principles were compromised. Film experts from the ICAIC have said that allowing Spain to take over the film industry in the late 1990s was “necesario e inevitable” (necessary and inevitable). The inevitability of this return was perhaps best foreshadowed by the first co-produced documentary, *Viaje a la semilla* (Return to the seed). Appropriating its title from a short story by Alejo Carpentier, it documented Fidel and Raúl Castro’s first visit to Galicia, Spain, in 1993 to see the land of their parents and reconnect with their Spanish roots. What began in 1997 with Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón’s *Cosas que dejé en la Habana*, a portrait of immigrant Cuban families living in Madrid, led to several other co-productions between Spain and Cuba that speak to the trans-Atlantic movement of culture and people, including Alexis Valdes’s *Un rey en la Habana* (2005). Clips of this film available on YouTube and on other video sharing sites demonstrate the worldwide distribution of such cultural production from Cuba as well as its popular appeal.

This chapter, although brief, is significant insofar as it complements discussions about power relations in the industry of cultural production. Examining a film directed and produced by Cuban-born, Miami-based star Alexis Valdés, produced in collaboration with both Spain and Cuba, is a unique case that opens the conversation to the role that Valdés as a Cuban diasporic subject plays in an industry open to foreign investment. *Un rey en la Habana* (2005) is a narrative film that as a singular case study expands and engages with the historical background of the Special Period and the New Spain of the

¹ Michael Chanan. *The Cuban Image: Cinema and Cultural Politics in Cuba*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 1985), Introduction.

1990s outlined in chapter 1. It speaks to arguments about Cubans finding (or not as the film shows) a space and place once they become part of Madrid's Cuban diaspora as discussed in chapter 2 and later in chapter 6. In relation to the industry of cultural production, the film's success attests to a demand for images that capture Cuba in this defining historical moment with the focus being on the Cuban family instead of artists in relation to the music industry as with *Habana Blues* and *Habana Abierta* as portrayed in chapters 3 and 4. As a singular case study, Alexis Valdes's *Un rey en la Habana* addresses the overarching framework of imperial nostalgia and its necessitating family trope. It also addresses how parody is a subversive tool for telling a story often told but never from the perspective of a director who has lived the history of Special Period Cuba and the New Spain as well as their aftermaths from the Havana-Madrid-Miami point of view, and as such has an authoritative voice to do so.

Un rey en la Habana: A Close Reading

From the title to its plot, this 2005 Alex Valdes film—where a comedic Cuban character literally disguises himself as a Spaniard in order to claim a supposed inheritance left behind in Madrid—lends itself to an analysis that focuses on the vestiges of imperial nostalgia in 1990s Cuba.² I offer a trans-Atlantic reading complemented by

² Alexis Valdes is a Cuban born actor, comedian, monologist, film producer and screenwriter who currently hosts the Miami-based television show *Esta Noche Tú Night*. He left Cuba for Spain during the 1990s, where he became very popular due to his performances in programs like *El Club De La Comedia*. Although he has had roles in various films (mostly co-produced)—*90 millas* (2005), *Un rey en La Habana* (2005), *El oro de Moscú* (2003), *Clara y Elena* (2001), *Tuno negro* (2001), *Torrente 2: Misión en Marbella* (2001), *Tatawo* (2000), *Salsa* (2000), *París Tombuctú* (1999)—*Un Rey En La Habana* is the only film he has produced and directed. In his movie, Valdes plays two characters: Papito, the Cuban male and Arturo, the Spanish male.

ideas set forth in Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* to discuss this film. The spectacular element inherent in the Cuban presence in Madrid is clear as the Cuban mulatto (turned Spaniard) with an Afro-Cuban sidekick (turned adoptive child)—reminiscent of Don Quijote and Sancho Panza—turn to comedic and picaresque modes of survival in Madrid. The animalization and infantilization of the Afro-Cuban immigrant speaks to both racial dichotomies of the colonial era and the inherent family trope in the Cuban immigrant's relation to the Spanish state.

The title of *Un rey en la Habana* bears close resemblance to the title of Pedro Juan Gutiérrez's 1999 novel *El rey de la Habana* (The King of Havana). Although the grammatical difference between THE KING OF HAVANA and A KING in HAVANA is slight, the kingly experiences for these men are quite different. While the royal moniker is bestowed upon a Cuban male named Rey from Centro Habana who survives the city's dirty realism in Gutiérrez's novel, the king of Valdés's film is a Spaniard who has traveled to Havana on a conquering mission. Arturo, *un rey*, a king, is one of many who has come to conquer Cuba—the Cuban woman serving as a trope for the island herself—in order to ensure a Madrid-based business venture in the sex worker trade that in repeating imperial models of exploitation, will benefit Spain at the expense of Cuba.

According to the film's narrator, aspiring actor Papito (Alexis Valdés), *Un rey* is a love story based on his own puppy love for Yoli, his next door neighbor and childhood crush. Papito eventually conquers Yoli's heart (Yoima Valdés, no relation to Alexis Valdés) until, in a series of comedic mishaps, Yoli's mother—la Caimana (the crocodile)—makes sure that Papito is no longer in the picture because “le va a desgraciara la vida” (he will ruin her life). Papito is unsuitable for Yoli because as an attractive

mulata in Special Period Cuba, the possibilities for Yoli finding love “con un extranjero” (a foreigner) are not only countless but necessary. Yoli’s options—the promise of monetary salvation for the family and an exit visa through marriage—cannot be compromised by “un amor de barrio” (a neighborhood fling). La Caimana (Alicia Bustamante) thus puts her Celestine matchmaking skills to work in favor of Yoli “y pesca al español,” she fishes the Spaniard from the sea of foreign men. A seemingly respectable businessman from Madrid, Arturo is the perfect catch.



Figure 5.1 Yoli (Zoima Valdés) and Don Arturo (Alexis Valdés) discussing wedding plans in *Un rey en la Habana* (2005).

Historically, King Arthur was the subject of legend, a mythical 6th century British King who would one day return in the role of a messiah to save his people. In this scene, Arturo de España is very much akin to that mythical character. As he makes his triumphant arrival into the tenements of Havana, to el Solar Mamey—with hand waving and kiss blowing etiquette proper of royalty—Arturo is welcomed by its flag waving residents who chant “Arturo, hermano, el pueblo te saluda, échale una mano” (help the people). El Mamey and the plea of its inhabitants comes to represent a microcosm of the dependency model between Spain and Cuba where a desperate Yoli reluctantly waits for a king’s arrival and easily submits to his conquest. As the promise of marriage arrives in

the person of Arturo, the family trope characteristic of imperial nostalgia is lucidly at play. Arturo is a brother, as his reception demonstrates, who through legal union will make Yoli *la reina del solar*, the queen of the tenement. Not knowing that Arturo's real motives for this union are based on a prostitution empire back in Spain, Yoli will never receive a royal treatment from her king.³ However, by Cuban standards of the Special Period that are promulgated by her mother—La Caimana—she has indeed hit the jackpot; Arturo ensures her and her family's escape from destitution. In reality what befalls this Cuban woman, Cuba feminized, is the burden of sacrifice, in a fashion similar to the sisters in *Cosas que dejé en la Habana* (1997), the female protagonists of *Flores de otro mundo* (1999), and the young immigrant mothers in *Agua con sal* (2005) and *Habana Blues* (2005). These co-produced films feature martyred Cuban women whose sacrificial actions are for their welfare and the survival of their families. Similarly, an island untouched by foreigners since the inception of the Revolution, Cuba must sacrifice basic revolutionary ideals that reject an outside presence in the island. Just as Yoli must subject herself to being *manoseada* (groped) by Arturo's foreign hands—foreign hands so wealthy that they are credited with paying off the island's external debt—so must Cuba accept the groping forces of foreign money and foreign desires.

³ It is estimated that between 300,000 and 500,000 women are prostitutes throughout Spain and that roughly 40% of Spanish men solicit prostitutes. There are 4,000 known brothels in the country generating 18 million Euros per year. It is a highly controlled business with Romanian, Russian, Nigerian and South American mafia rings at their forefront. With increased immigration to Spain and less labor opportunities for immigrant women, prostitution is increasingly a viable option either in response to castings in their countries of origin by these rings, forcefully under false migratory pretences or willfully once they arrive in Spain. It is estimated that 95% of prostitutes in Spain are immigrant women. Of those that are from Latin America, most are Brazilian, Argentine, and Paraguayan. See articles by David Fernández "Las mafias de la prostitución dirigen 4.000 burdeles en España." *20 minutos.es*. (Jan 8, 2008), Electronic version and Marta Babiano Fernández del Villar "La prostitución en España." *Colectivos Sociedad by Suite 101*. (18 Feb 2010) *Electronic Version*. See also Joan Cantarero's *Los Amos de La Prostitución En España (Crónica Actual)*. (Madrid: Ediciones B, 2007). In the context of *Un rey en la Habana*, Don Arturo is indeed seeking to emply Yoli in a Russian prostitution ring operating out of Madrid.



Figure 5.2 Yoli's family—Yuri(the little person) , La Caimana, La Gorda— celebrates with Don Arturo in *Un rey en la Habana*.

Once Yoli's family begins to catch up with Arturo, the conversation quickly steers to curiosity about the world outside the island—a malady of insularity, to borrow the term from the writer José Lezama Lima. As Yoli's brother, Yuri (José Téllez), films the conversation with Arturo's video camera, the audience is exposed to the use of Russian formalisms's "Laying bare the device." This film within the film stunt tells us that Yuri's point of view—that of the Afro-Cuban man—is acceptable until he dares to say that while Spain is a developed country it is no United States. Furthermore, it is important to note that Yuri's character is played by a little person (*un enano* as he is called) who is symbolically emasculated by being portrayed by a short person who is given a feminine name.⁴ Yuri is literally at a lower level than Don Arturo, infantile as his seemingly silly questions reveal, reaffirming both his insignificance and inferiority when compared to the taller, authoritative European male. Likewise, Don Arturo's archenemy in the battle for Yoli's love is Papito, a diminutive form of the colloquial Latin American

⁴ According to a Wikipedia article on the name Yuri, it is commonly assigned to women, deriving from the Russian form of George. See "Yuri." *Wikipedia*. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yuri>. George comes from the Greek for earth-worker or farmer, someone close to the land. See "George." *Wikipedia*. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_\(given_name\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_(given_name)). In this case, Yuri is literally close to the land as a little person, far removed from Arthur whose name is associated with the high and mighty mythic hero.

term *papi* in refering to a desirable man. A man who is a *papito* cannot compare, in terms of class, to a Don such as Arturo and thus he too is emasculated within the film, creating a recognizable racial hierarchy that places Yuri (Afro-Cuban male) at the bottom rung, Papito (mulato male) in the middle, and Don Arturo (the male Spaniard) at the chain's acme. Following Yuri's untimely comment about U.S. superiority in comparison to that of Spain, La Caimana quickly strips Yuri of the filming privilege and the filming within the film is now from her point of view, which we can already decipher is quite contrary to her son's. Given the centuries old intertwined histories of Cuba, the U.S. and Spain, a defensive Arturo reverts to nationalist rhetoric saying Spain is the best nation in the world, Spain is number one, you'll see when you get there. With the camera on him, Arturo engages in a speech of sorts about the state of the world, which is to be understood through colonial binaries (black/white, rich/poor, and even tall/short). Moments before, within the family itself, we learn that the vestiges of these binaries are alive and well when Yuri is told by his sister that she is more cultured than he is by virtue of her whiteness. By affirming that racial and economic inequality not only exists but must exist in the world, Arturo's essentialist rhetoric confirms a perspective that is typically observed in imperial discourse. He concludes that in this world someone has to get screwed, that is just the way it is and no one is going to change it. If Yoli goes through with the marriage, she will literally be screwed as Arturo's plans for her are wrought by exploitation. Hence, in this stagnant world order, Cuba gets screwed.



Figure 5.3. *Yuri and La Gorda try to revive a dead Don Arturo*

While stating that the world is fixed may seem contradictory to the tenets of imperial nostalgia—mourning the way things used to be under colonial rule and actively striving to re-establish forms of neo-colonial order—it is not. The history of Spain and Cuba dictates that while the latter never ceased to formally break ties with Cuba even during the Franco years when Castro’s political project was at odds with that of his Galician compatriot, Spain lost its political control of the island in 1898 and with the onset of the Revolution in 1959 Spaniards were no longer allowed to migrate to Cuba. Thus the degree to which Spain and Spaniards have been protagonists in Cuban history has fluctuated. The nostalgia lies in recreating a relationship between both countries based on a dependency model that until the Special Period was nonexistent. With imperial nostalgia comes imperial responsibility—to undo or correct the past that culminates in imperial loss, so as to alleviate the burden of that loss—as well as the surfacing of colonialties of power. Although imperial nostalgia allows the sentiment of lament behind the age old adage *Más se perdió en Cuba* (more was lost in Cuba) to be rectified, it sets the stage for *Más se perderá a España* (more will be lost to Spain) from the Cuban perspective. As Arturo toasts, not to love, or to his future with his betrothed but rather to the product of colonialism—“the best invention born of Spaniards: la

mulata”—it is clear that that racially mixed woman representative of Cuba herself, is the first thing lost to the battle against imperial nostalgia.

La Caimana also falls to the whim of imperial rhetoric, aiding and abetting Arturo’s conquest. After Yuri, again distasteful in his commentary, pokes fun at Arturo’s comment, his mother reminds him that what Arturo says is law. She orders him to say what Arturo says and do as Arturo does, helping re-inscribe the master/slave dichotomy into the European male/Cuban male relationship. Indirectly, she tells him to adhere to the proverb “Monkey see, monkey do” which will ensure their future in Spain. Throughout the rest of the film, the animalistic references of a similar nature are made toward Yuri that ties into the racist outlook born of the slave-master dichotomy to the interpersonal relationships between Cubans and Spaniards. La Caimana closes the scene with an act of mimicry typical of the colonized/colonizer relation, proposing a toast to friendly relations between the people of Spain and Cuba. She drinks to the perpetuation of marriages of interest that through her daughter speaks to a Cuban future that holds historic self-redemption for Spain and redemption for Cuba. Her toast falls on deaf ears as Don Arturo dies shortly thereafter, after ingesting a little blue pill (*una pastillita para singlar* as La Gorda says) to help him celebrate his future nuptials with Yoli. What follows is a series of comedic acts of *picardía* (cunning ways) in which Papito’s homosexual drag queen friend furnishes him his new identity.⁵ A white latex mask covering his face and hair—that begins to turn green within 48 hours—simulating Don Arturo’s face, contacts—to simulate his blue eyes, and a fake mustache coupled with the three piece suit left by the

⁵ It is worth noting that in *Habana Blues* discussed in Chapter 4 it is also a homosexual drag queen who provides Tito and Ruy with resources to put on their concert in Havana. Both films reveal an economic stability amongst homosexual performers that is worth exploring but is not within the scope of this analysis.

deceased all set the stage for Papito to begin his performance as Don Arturo. He marries Yoli as Arturo and shortly thereafter he leaves for Madrid with Yuri, Yoli's short brother, dressed up to pass for a little boy.



Figure 5.4 Papito fixing his deteriorating Don Arturo mask in Alcalá de Henares



Figure 5.5 Papito and Yuri (dressed as a sailor and playing the part of an adopted son named Jesús) about to hitchhike to Madrid

The family trope that is central to imperial nostalgia is lucidly at work in *Un rey en la Habana* following Don Arturo's sudden death. Papito returns to Spain, disguised as Arturo with a new addition to the imperial family—Yuri in the guise of an adopted son name Jesús. The fake Arturo introduces this child by reverting to the discourse of imperial responsibility, informing his cheating wife that he has to feed their child. Yuri comes to stand in for the Cuban diaspora, an orphan (of the Soviet Union) that comes home to Spain to be rescued from despair. Through adoption, he has been saved from his orphan condition just as Cuba and its diaspora in Spain has been adopted and redeemed. It is not Yuri but Jesús (Yuri's character dressed up as a child), who achieves this

homecoming to the Spanish family because once completed, the adopted child takes on the role of the Messiah. As parent country rescues needy child, adoption becomes synonymous of re-conquest and in need of parentage, Jesús/Cuba/the Cuban diaspora redeems Spain from that history of loss dated to 1898.



Figure 5.6 Don Arturo's wife teaching her new adoptive son Jesús (Yuri) the difference in value between the U.S. dollar and the Spanish Euro

Initially the new mom is less than receptive to Jesús. Her incredulity at having *esto* (this thing) as her child, establishes what throughout the film has been the dehumanization and subsequent animalization of the racialized Cuban subject. Earlier in the film, Yuri is shown peddling his bici-taxi like an animal would his loaded carriage. He is the biological son of an alligator, la Caimana, and he is a cannibal, being amongst the guests at Yoli's wedding reception that feasts on what disguised as pork is actually the remains of the real Arturo. He barbarically savors the colonizer's flesh, relishing in it in excess. This scene of cannibalism whereby the tasty Spaniard is savagely devoured is reminiscent of a similar end given to the colonizing Frenchman by the native Tupinambás in Nelson Pereira dos Santos's Brazilian black comedy *Como Era Gostoso o Meu Francês* (1971), where a Frenchman (Arduíno Colassanti) is devoured as an act of revenge in a war waged

between French and Portuguese colonizers.⁶ A mercenary, the unnamed Frenchman is out working for a monetary reward in the same way that Arturo is working Yoli and her family in order to take her to back to a lucrative prostitution business in Madrid. Whereas Don Arturo died of natural causes unlike the Frenchman in dos Santos's film, the eating of his flesh can be read as an act of revenge as well because his death dooms Yoli and her family to a metaphoric extermination as their chances for escaping Cuba die with him. Ultimately, if he can't get Yoli and her family out of Cuba, he can at least feed their literal hunger so in eating Don Arturo lies their revenge for him dying on them. Ultimately, this act of cannibalism revitalizes Yoli and her family because Papito and Yuri can execute their mission in Madrid and return to Cuba with money for survival without sacrificing Yoli.

In *Un rey en la Habana*, Yuri embarks on his trans-Atlantic journey as an infantilized racialized immigrant subject, a *marinerito* (a little sailor), who manages to pass as a child because of his short stature. Yuri becomes Jesús, a Cuban adoptive son, in Spain. Here, the nautical wardrobe is not gratuitous as it reinforces that migratory movement across the sea. In a grotesque portrayal of racism, his first encounter with a Spaniard results in him being mistaken for an orangutan as the cab driver asks if he is part of the circus that is in town. His first encounter with his new mother ends in a

⁶ Nelson Pereira Dos Santos, dic. *Como Era Gostoso o Meu Frances.Francês*. Film 1971. *Como Era Gostoso o Meu Francês* (1971) or *How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman* is a film that shows how rival French and Portuguese settlers are utilizing the indigenous people of Brazil as allies in their struggle to establish control. The Tupinambás cannibalize a Frenchman as revenge in this war but he is first given a wife, akin to Don Arturo's fate in *Un rey*. In the last seconds of his life the Frenchman refuses to play along with the ceremonial script that the Tupinambás expect him to follow and instead predicts that his death will not revitalize them (as his death and the subsequent cannibal feast is intended to do) but rather will doom them all to extermination. The movie ends with a postscript that reveals that the Tupinambás were exterminated within a relatively short period of time after they killed and ate the "tasty" Frenchman.

scolding, complete with a discipline-imposing slap across his face. The mother reminds the child that he is no longer in the (Cuban) jungle but in Spain, a civilized country where there are rules of conduct. These episodes echo scenarios commonly born of the colonial situation, which Frantz Fanon has described in *Black Skin, White Mask* as a special one, born of the confrontation between what are civilized and primitive people. Arturo, Papito wearing his white mask, puts an end to this seemingly common clash, demanding that from this point forward they act like what they now are—a *classic* Spanish family. Eventually the mother does warm up to Jesús, teaching him how to dance *sevillanas*, how to color and distinguish the value between currencies.⁷

The welcoming family dynamic is short lived. Jesús and Papito (Arturo sans mask) must fend for themselves, as immigrant subjects, beyond the confines of the domestic space. It is in Arturo's native Alcalá de Henares—birthplace of Miguel de Cervantes—that the illusion of Cubans forming part of the Spanish family quickly dies. Once Papito takes off the mask of Arturo, he is no longer King Arthur, no longer the head of family, not longer a Spanish citizen but just a foreign mulato without papers. Without his white skin, his place in Spanish society changes, the stability of being home dismantles and it becomes obvious that while Cubans may be imagined to form part of the extended Spanish family, they are actually just undesirable immigrants. This is clearly seen when Papito is in public. Frazzled by the events that have occurred since their arrival in Madrid, Papito takes to the main plaza and has a heart to heart with Cervantes's statue. He asks the patron saint of all Quijotes—himself and his Afro-Cuban Sancho

⁷ The "child" is taught *sevillanas*, a regional dance from Seville in Andalucía, Spain. During the Franco era, the image of Andalucía in southern Spain was understood to be that of the exotic while paradoxically becoming a synecdoche of a unified Spain (*Una, Grande, Libre*). It bears resemblance to the arguments here posed about Cuba as that which is exotic and foreign considered, at times a fragment that does not belong to the whole and at times, crucial to the completion of the national whole.

Panza included—to help him conquer the windmills, to get through this performance to ensure the welfare of Yoli, his “Dulcinea del Mamey”. This scene is reminiscent of the one in the *Habana Abierta* documentary discussed in chapter 4. Papito addresses the statue of the authorial voice on the topic of imagination in the same way that artist Boris Larramendi (singer and guitarist) addresses the singing voice who authored “Imagine”—John Lennon. Larramendi asks Lennon to help him conquer his and his musical group’s metaphoric windmills as they take on their first official performance on Cuban soil. Neither scene is gratuitous as they both speak to the workings of the imagination for silenced subjects who hope for and imagine an ideal world, a reality ulterior to the one they live. Papito—a Cuban mulato now an undocumented mulato in Spain—imagines an ideal world where, as John Lennon’s song suggests, “we are all one people, one world,” and neither his race nor his legal status will impede him taking care of his pending business. Likewise, Larramendi and the other artists of *Habana Abierta* must imagine an ideal world where there is no government-imposed censorship that silences their music. Their performance in Havana is conditioned by their success abroad whereas they had been silenced due to what was perceived the subversive nature of their music. As a group, *Habana Abierta* has the privilege of returning to their homeland and have a voice, a space in the national imaginary that they had hoped could have come without the migratory experience. Both sets of performers hope for, imagine and ask for strength and guidance to put on stellar performances that could potentially change life for Papito back in Cuba and the life of Cuban artistic expression on the island. In line with the lyrics of “Imagine,” Papito demonstrates that “You may say I am a dreamer, but I am not the only one” as and Larramendi and *Habana Abierta* follow suit.

Following the scene described above, Papito continued to ramble in the plaza. A police officer who senses that Papito is out of place and out of tune with reality, asks him for his identification. He finds that Papito, “*el negro... que se parece a estos sudacas de mierda*” looks nothing like the older Spanish Arturo pictured on the national ID card. Papito escapes from the law only to be arrested at the end of the film. Once arrested, Papito is reminded that his existence in Spain is an illusion, in following the Quixotic lexicon. He does not exist in the eyes of the Spanish state as an illegal, undocumented immigrant. By inserting his criticism about foreigners’ rights, including the right to citizenship, we learn that the officer’s right wing perspective (here representative of Spanish law and its enforcement) reflects Fascist ideals that are at odds with the family trope inherent in imperial nostalgia. The disparity speaks to a 1990s Spain that while open to immigration is not necessarily prepared—psychologically, socially and economically—to receive foreigners. Here, the case of the Cuban immigrant is one that while embraced in some instances—accepted as foreign in a domestic sense—in other instances can be rejected as simply another foreign outcast. Papito’s punishment is expressed through what Balibar calls neo-racist attitudes that make cultural difference insurmountable; he is being deported, back to his “cumbia dancing” communist country. This Cuban Quijote returns to El Mamey with his Sancho Panza—who throughout the film, as an Afro-Cuban man plays second fiddle to papito the mulato male— Euros in hand, having conquered all the windmills in his path. He had successfully passed for Don Arturo with his wife in a stellar performance of a Spanish male complete with a Castilian accent. He survived employment for the Russian prostitution ring that, via Don Arturo, intended to recruit Yoli, without having to partake in the actual business of recruitment.

Papito had assured a safe return to Cuba via deportation after a run in with a staunchly anti-immigrant Spanish officer of the law. Most importantly, he had successfully smuggled mafia money from one of his jobs back to Cuba. He eventually marries Yoli and thus becomes a real Daddy, a Papito. He continues his career as an actor in Havana and the film closes with the entire family—Yuri, Yoli, La Caimana, la Gorda and Papito—huddled around the next generation, a newborn baby girl. As the family trope closes the film, Papito’s Quixotic promise of ruling an *insula*, an island, comes true and he is the king in Havana.

Vestiges of Almodóvar: Historical Recycling, Camp, and Cannibalism

During the years of *La Transición* (1975-1978) Spain sought to free its cultural and artistic legacy from the Fascist ideology which had used it for its own political needs during the regime. Alejandro Yarza argues, in his book entitled *Un caníbal en Madrid: Sensibilidad camp y el reciclaje de la historia en el cine de Pedro Almodóvar*, that *camp* was the answer to revamping said legacy.⁸ Andrew Ross, Susan Sontag, Mark Booth and Esther Newton each define the term *camp* as per the qualifiers they find relevant, but they agree on a basic definition of *camp* as an aesthetic sensibility that through frivolity relies on parody and irony to critique that which is considered to be conventional, be it morals, values, or political points of view. Concentrating on the 1980s and 1990s filmic productions of Spain’s cinematographer par excellence—Pedro Almodóvar—Yarza says “El *camp* va al Rastro, por así decirlo, para reciclar la *ropa usada de la historia*.”⁹

Similarly, in *Un rey en la Habana*, Alexis Valdés also addresses a transition in Cuban

⁸ A similar book on the topic is Alejandro Varderi. *Severo Sarduy y Pedro Almodovar: Del Barroco al Kitsch en la Narrativa y el Cine Postmodernos*. (Madrid: Pliegos, 1996).

⁹ Alejandro Yarza. *Un caníbal en Madrid: Sensibilidad camp y el reciclaje de la historia en el cine de Pedro Almodóvar*. (Madrid: Ediciones Libertarias, 1999) 17.

society from a failed centrally planned economy to a market economy open to capitalistic ventures. If Almodóvar goes to Madrid's flea market to take up this recycling of the past, Valdés goes to *el solar* to recycle the history of colonial need and imperial solution that resurfaces in Special Period Cuba.¹⁰ The cultural and artistic legacy Valdés is attempting to rectify is one tied to the myth of Cuban anti-imperialist stance and sentiment unequivocally associated with the Castro regime. He undoes the myth of the Revolution that refuses to sell out to the influence of the global market economy. He exposes the fact that it is not anti-imperialism but rather anti-Americanism, with the exception of American currency needed during the 1990s, which continues to define the Revolution's project. Spanish capitalism and exploitation is acceptable, its American counterpart is not. Here, the hypocrisy of the dominant culture is exposed and vehemently confronted with what Valdés perceives as its inconsistencies. Likewise, Valdés wants to unmask the tail of oppression—soliciting Cuban women for prostitution rings in Spain aside—associated with Spain's aggressive economic return to Cuba. He demonstrates that at the local level, Cubans are literally eating it up (Spain's return) as the cannibalistic scene at the party shows, because it is a solution to an unresolved looming problem. Papito turned Arturo welcomes the role he must play, the masks he must wear and the risks he must take in order to ensure a better future. Through *Un rey en la Habana* Alexis Valdés also reaffirms the lingering spirit of Fascism in its xenophobic treatment of the "Othered" subject. He thus takes a history of Spanish colonial conquest and Cuban conquering, Spanish re-conquering in light of the Special Period and Cuban re-conquest, and a New Spain with old attitudes—deeply rooted in nationalistic myth of homogeneity—about

¹⁰ Almodóvar has worked with two actresses featured in *Un rey en la Habana*. They are Cuban actress María Isabel Díaz (*Volver*, 2006) who plays the unnamed sister of Yuri and Yoli, and Spanish actress Carmen Marchi (*Hable con ella* 2002) who plays the role of Don Arturo's wife/Jesus's mother.

social plurality. In both the case of Cuba and Spain, this film subverts political and social hegemonic discourse.



Figure 5.7 Final campy scene of Papito and Yuri in flight from Spain back to Cuba. It is reminiscent of the final scene of the 1984 American film ET

Alexis Valdés achieves this cannibalistic feat through a comedic form of *camp* that fuses the definition of various critics. Yarza uses the term cannibalism to describe the act of ingesting this unwanted history and its objects produced by means and ideologies that are non-existent, digesting and re-semanticizing them through contemporary aesthetic codes.¹¹ In this movie, two intersecting historical moments in Cuba's and Spain's histories are ingested and digested to produce a fictive story laden with vestiges of imperial nostalgia from the Cuban perspective in the face of hardship communicated through parody. By employing humor, the juxtaposition of otherwise disparate elements (a mulato who passes for a white European, a little person who passes for a child) and theatricality (the mask of Don Arturo and its respective roles), the director establishes the form of *camp* that is situational, born of a concrete historical situation, as proposed by

¹¹ Yarza 63.

Esther Newton in *Mother Camp*.¹² The literal ingestion of Don Arturo in the film—what Susan Sontag would call an element of shocking excess key to an understanding of *camp*—is an act of actual and theatrical cannibalism that allows Cubans to re-insert themselves in their history as a self-sufficient people.¹³ Papito will, although through theatricality, take on the role of Don Arturo and be his own savior, thus subverting the premise of the white man's burden. It may have been the mask resembling the Spanish male, the guise of the white man, that allows him to exit Cuba but it is his performance that salvages his future. This new history proposed coincides with Mark Booth's definition of *camp* which places the aesthetic within the history of self-representation of certain emergent groups.¹⁴ I contend there are four groups to consider. The first is Cubans on the island who are surfacing as a group of new colonial subjects in the likes of Yoli, Yuri and La Caimana. These characters represent the Cuban family that must re-adjust to the Spanish mother's return to the home she lost a century earlier and the changes that the return entails necessitates a new way of portraying Cubans like them in this film. Through parody and *campy* scenes of savage behavior like that of Yuri and other Cubans eating Don Arturo, Valdés plays into stereotypes of the colonized as savage subjects in need of rescue from their barbaric state, as Renato argues, via the Messianic influence of European civilization.¹⁵ Secondly, *Un rey en la Habana* considers the self-representation of Spaniards as a group newly confronted by an ever increasingly multi-cultural society—a direct result of their renewed identity as conquerors—in both cities like

¹² Esther Newton. *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1972). Although she speaks specifically about camp as a sensibility of the homosexual community and its presence in drag, I borrow the three categories mentioned—humor, juxtaposition, and theatricality—as I see their use in the film.

¹³ Susan Sontag. "Notes on Camp," *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. (New York: Picador 2001) 17.

¹⁴ Mark Booth. *Camp*. (London: Quartet Books, 1983).

¹⁵ Renato 108.

Madrid and its outskirts, here Alcalá de Henares. Reverting to black/white, savage/civilization, parental/infantilization dichotomies reminiscent of the colonial condition now tinged with irony and parody, Alexis Valdés intentionally confronts the ills of a society that seems to be new but retains much of its old character. The third group that is self-represented is that of the immigrant who brings the plurality, unwelcomed by *la guardia civil*, to Spain. Portraying the forceful return home by Papito and Yuri/Jesús through a parody of E.T.'s return home serves as an element of comedic excess to portray the irony of two Cubans who made it out of Cuba and yearn to return because they, as aliens, simply do not have a place in Spanish society. The incorporation of a cartoon graphic that maps the return from capitalism and its iconic *toro* to communism and its iconic palm tree, highlights the parody of the situation this third group faces. Alexis Valdés is himself to be considered representative of the fourth emergent group that seeks *campy* self-representation through *Un rey*. In "Uses of Camp" Andrew Ross contends that the *camp* aesthetic is created

...cuando los productos de un modo de producción anterior, que ya ha perdido su poder de dominar los significados culturales, se vuelven accesibles, en el presente para su redefinición de acuerdo a códigos estéticos contemporáneos.¹⁶

Film as a medium is that product whose former mode of production—strictly Cuban and with pedagogical aims supporting the regime's ideal—is lost to the economic hardships of the Special Period thereby forfeiting its ability to dominate cultural signifiers. Film becomes accessible to the likes of Alexis Valdés who, although Cuban-born and living in the United States after boomeranging from Havana to Madrid to Miami, was able to

¹⁶ Andrew Ross. "Uses of Camp", *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture*. (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1989), 61.

collaborate with Spain's TeleCinco Network to co-produce the film.¹⁷ The most appropriate of people to engage in such a project, because he has lived, as both an artist and as a Cuban subject, all sides of the story he tells through *Un rey en la Habana*. His fame as a comedian translates into symbolic capital—in the likes of Dominican comedian Luisito Martí, protagonist of the *Nueba Yol* 1 and 3 film series (1995 and 1997 respectively, no part 2 was filmed, directed by Ángel Muñiz) who as a Dominican migrants to New York City has illusions about fortune acquisition and is instead faced with the realities of being an undocumented immigrant with legal restrictions on employment opportunities and everyday freedoms. This symbolic capital—being a household name in Miami, Havana and Madrid empowers him with an authoritative voice and recognizable presence to address such issues as the coloniality of power that Spain exerts over Cuba in light of the Special Period and both the ongoing exploitation of immigrant women and devalued nature of the racialized immigrant subject in contemporary Spain. While benefiting from the Cuba-Spain-U.S. triangle, Alexis Valdés also bridges gaps between all three spaces. Valdés's insistence on laying bare the device within the film's narrative time speaks to his interest in consciously evoking reappropriation of the medium that allows the revamping of old stories through a new aesthetic lens.

¹⁷ After conducting research at Cuba's ICAIC during the summer of 2007 and 2008, it is worth noting that Cuba's film institute does not consider *Un rey en la Habana* a co-production and therefore does not catalogue it as one. According to the guidelines used by ICAIC to classify a film as a co-production after 1991, a foreign production company must fund all shooting costs and Cuba provides location, set and actors. These conditions were met by Alexis Valdés's film and it is marketed as a co-production in Spain and the United States.

Chapter 6. The Cuban Literary Boom in Spain

Co-produced films and European-produced music albums such as those mentioned in the previous chapters remind us that nearly half a century after its birth, the Cuban Revolution and its fate continues to be a key factor used in the marketing of Cuban cultural products. Film and music are not alone as the publishing industry has also played a leading role in the selling of Cuba through its literature in light of the Special Period. Literary production of Cuban texts financed by Spanish investment is the fourth realm of cultural production, alongside that of spatial production (chapter 1) and those of musical and filmic production (chapters 3, 4, and 5) which exhibits the neo-colonial power relations between both countries in the last decade of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. This chapter discusses the Cuban literary boom of the 1990s as it occurred in Barcelona and presents two case studies of novels published by Barcelona editorial houses—Alexis Díaz-Pimienta's *Maldita danza* (2002) and Lisette Bustamante's *Jinetteras* (2003)—which address the experiences of Cuban women as diasporic subjects in Madrid in the aftermath of the Special Period.

The Revolution's triumph in 1959 served as an impetus for a collective self-consciousness throughout Latin America that reverberated in its literary output. As authors began to see their nations sharing a common history of colonialism and exploitation, postcolonial legacies of underdevelopment, and the common threat of U. S. intervention in national affairs, their writings reflected this awakening. The Cuban

Revolution's anti-imperialist rhetoric sparked a sense of self-determination throughout the region that ushered a period of cultural effervescence that resulted in the Latin American Literary Boom of the 1960s and 70s. Fueled by the publishing industry's interest in distributing the literary works of these writers like José Donoso, Mario Vargas Llosa and Gabriel García Márquez, it was the Catalan publishing house Seix Barral that led investments in the production and distribution of these works. Scholars like Alejandro Herrero-Olaizola have documented the importance of Barcelona, as an avant garde city, for this flourishing publishing industry that three decades later, spearheads the distribution of Cuban literature once again. Numerous publishing houses in the region—Editorial Roca, Anagrama, Altera and Poliedro among others—turned their attention to Cuban writers during the 1990s. This proliferation of Special Period Fiction has been documented by Esther Whitfield in *Cuban Currency* where she points out that this type of literature is thematically attuned to the turmoil of that decade it presented, presenting a structured but implicit critique of the relationships with foreign nations it engendered. She suggests that Cuban writers on the island have made market-driven images of Cuba—an impoverished but sensual population and architectural ruins that invoke a ruined social project—insistent figures in their work in order to ensure marketability. The claims she makes are relevant to any discussion of Cuban fiction produced during this decade because it raises questions about what exactly makes Cuba a hot literary commodity. My interest lies in Cuban authors whose literature is produced in Spain during the 1990s and into the early twenty-first century that speak to the Cuban diasporic experience there. It is a literature informed by the Special Period, narrating a diasporic experience fueled by this time of economic demise. Yanitzia Canetti's *Al otro lado* (Seix

Barral, 2001), Roger Sala's *Florinda y los boleros de Cristal* (Ediciones de la Tempestad, 2002), Alexis Díaz Pimienta's *Maldita danza* (Alba Editorial, 2002), José Abreu Felipe's *Dile adiós a la virgen* (Poliedro, 2003), Lissette Bustamante's *Jineteras* (Altera, 2003), and Karla Suárez's *Viajera* (Editorial Roca, 2005) speak of the unresolved issues of racism, sexism and poverty that carry over from Special Period Cuba to the *España de la apertura*. Specifically, it is in this second Barcelona Boom of the 1990s that I seek to explore the portrait of the Cuban woman's migratory experience in Madrid and how it translates into a market for literature. To that end, I will engage in a close reading of Alexis Díaz Pimienta's 2002 novel *Maldita danza*, and in an attempt to expand the study of this migratory experience to include other European countries, I engage with Lissette Bustamante's 2003 novel *Jineteras* which takes place in Madrid but speaks to the female Cuban experience in Austria as well. I unfortunately will not discuss the work of Cuban publishing houses based in Madrid such as Felipe Lázaro's Betania (since 1987), Pío Serrano's Verbum (since 1990s), Víctor Batista-Falla's Colibrí (since 1998) or Fabio Murrieta's Aduana Vieja (in Cádiz since 2003). This, as well as the discussion of other publications in the likes of the Madrid-based magazines *Cuba Encuentro*, the *Revista Hispano-Cubana*, *OtroLunes* and others from throughout Spain, remains for the future.

Maldita danza: Madrid and Its Tópicos

Published by the Barcelona based publishing house Alba Editorial in 2002, Alexis Díaz Pimienta's *Maldita danza* is a novel about a young Cuban woman pursuing a

musicology degree in Madrid. Her experience as a diasporic subject and member of the Velvet Exile speaks to the realities of a gendered, racialized body that although physically removed from Cuba is reminded of her so-called “essential” Cuban characteristics in her quotidian living in Spain. She is never given a proper name, rather she is identified by her career, *La Musicóloga*. By virtue of birthplace—as a native of Havana’s *La Timba* neighborhood—she is a *timbera*, also the name for a woman who dances Rueda de Casino (a Cuban form of salsa dancing in a wheel formation) to the popular *timba* music of the Revolution. Ironically, she doesn’t “feel” the music, nor does she dance to the tune of the Cuban culture that it represents. Confessing that she has two left feet, her exoticized body never moves to the beat as is expected of her, she merely observes music and dance, approaching both from the perspective of the intellectual. Unlike her female diasporic counterparts, her profession places her in academia, not in a dance academy or on the dance floor, making her connection to Cuban music not through her own body but through the body of literature about it. A young Cuban woman who thinks and theorizes about music and dance, instead of actively partaking in and embodying both, she confesses, makes her an “atypical” cubana. As she fights against *los tópicos*, stereotypes—of the Caribbean, of the Cuban woman, of the mulata Cuban woman—her diasporic experience is marred by Spanish imperial nostalgia—Cuba as music, Cuba as sex, and Cuba as the tropics of desire. All of these colonial associations, assuming fixity of image and difference, are transposed onto the Cuban woman’s body without escape, shaping her life abroad. Unable to escape the confines of this wicked movement, this maldita danza of tópicos, the narrator exploits irony and relies on the circular rueda dance as a trope of the repeating island, this dance of improvised

choreography whose paradoxical nature is reflective of the nation it represents, to reveal her paralleled entrapment in Spain. Step by step, the narrator exploits irony and dance as allegory for border crossings to locate this Cuban woman in her search—circular like that *rueda*—for sexual identity within the constructs of racialized femininity both at home and as a diasporic subject.

The experiences the protagonist narrates must be understood through the lens of racial/cultural otherness and that of the colonial stereotype in postcolonial times. The stereotype is a form of identification, as Homi Bhabha explains in his chapter “The Other Question” in *The Location of Culture*.¹ Bhabha argues that the racial stereotype in particular exemplifies the paradox of otherness in postcolonial racism which exaggerates the difference of the Other while attempting to produce them as a stable knowable object. This paradoxical nature of colonial otherness is thus represented by the motif of the spiral as it is a relentless oscillating movement between both point. The stereotype is in itself trans-Atlantic in nature as I have shown in earlier chapters and is thus the element that like the colonial diasporic subject exists in a parallel fashion in two worlds, Havana and Madrid; it also ensures its repeatability.

“*Ser mulata, ser joven, ser cubana y vivir en España es un fastidio. Hay que luchar contra el tópico*” (being biracial, young, Cuban and living in Spain is a hassle. You have to fight against stereotypes). This is the opening phrase of the novel that becomes a chorus for *La Musicóloga* throughout *Maldita danza*. Her observation addresses the intersection of race and sexuality discourses with the male gaze upon the Cuban woman’s body, born of the conquering Spanish male and inherited by the Cuban

¹ Homi Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*. (New York: Routledge) 1994.

male. As racism and sexism function together in a historical system of complimentary exclusions, Étienne Balibar explains that the polymorphism of racism makes connections between practices of social normalizations and exclusion. Both on the island and in Spain, Cuban women are imagined and excluded according to these normalizations: *la cubana* as *jinetera* (a prostitute), *la cubana* as *mulata* (biracial), *la cubana* as *candela* (synonymous with movement) and of course the intersection of all three. The fixity of otherness instantiates mutually-exclusive identity categories which function—in the words of Childs and William in *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory*—“as the cardinal point of colonial subjectification for colonizer and colonized alike.”² If *Musicóloga* seeks in Madrid an escape from the repeating island and its repeating discourses about the Cuban woman, she finds that the patterns established by imperial frameworks simply repeat themselves across the Atlantic. While in principle her challenge is to earn her degree, it actually becomes *luchando contra el tópico*, fighting the stereotype, de-pigeonholing *la cubana* from relegation to *el bailoteo* (dancing) and *el jineteo* (prostitution). She reflects on these essentialist *tópicos* she must fight against:

Cuba es un trópico de tópicos. Y ahí estamos nosotras, las cimbreantes mujeres del Caribe, elevadas a la categoría inamovible de diosas del sexo y del baile: no importa que te hayas mantenido virgen hasta cumplir los veinticinco años, todo un récord en Cuba; tampoco importa que no hayas aprendido jamás a bailar nada... no, no importa: eres mulata, eres joven, eres cubana, y vives en España, para más desgracia. O no, en España no, en Madrid, que es mucho más que España, en Lavapiés, que es una mezcla de todos los Madrises.³

² Peter Childs and R.J. Patrick Williams. *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory*. (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf: 1997) 1.

³ “Cuba—the tropics of stereotypes. There we are, trembling women of the Caribbean, elevated to the unwavering category of goddesses: of sex, of dance: it makes no difference that you preserved your virginity until you were 25, quite an achievement in Cuba; it also doesn’t matter that you never learned how to dance anything, nope, it doesn’t matter: you are biracial, young, Cuban and you live in Spain, to top it all off. Oh no, not in Spain, in Madrid, which is more than just Spain, in the Lavapiés neighborhood, a mix of all the Madrises in one.”

Although her education and her personal experience sets her apart from the “typical” Cuban woman, she is born into and later migrates to a place where the patriarchal culture is imbued with a colonial worldview that can only see the mulata caribeña as the essence of tropical desire. Individuality is discarded; she is *una del montón* (one of the bunch). Erased is the fact that she “jugó con lo prohibido como una señorita, cerró las piernas y controló la fiebre y el deseo como una señorita” (“played with what was forbidden like a lady, closed her legs like a lady and controlled her sexual desire like a lady”). In a place like Lavapiés, known for its eclectic immigrant population, the potential for recreating the self, meshing into this melting pot of races, colors and genders, should be fairly simple. Here, *La Musicóloga* should be able to be who she wants to be, who she feels to be, not one more hot-blooded mulata, but a lady. Yet she cannot shed her cultural baggage because she returns to the seed of its inception. Relocation does not heal dislocation for this female subject as discourses defining her *there then* are reconstructed *here now*. While Lavapiés may be a place of belonging for the immigrant, from the Spanish perspective, Lavapiés is the place of not belonging. It is a space of the periphery, excluded from the capital Spanish imaginary, the space of the “othered” immigrant subject. Conditioned by difference—ethnic, racial, socioeconomic—Lavapiés is a place where colonial dynamics are alive and well, where stereotypes about the Cuban mulata are not only reinforced but revisited. The island thus repeats itself even in the diaspora.

Although *La Musicóloga* tries to dance around her stereotyped gendered subjectivity in Lavapiés, it is not an easy task. She does so mostly by disidentifying with the Cuban community and shunning its men who keep alive the *maldita danza*, that damned dance of damning colonial discourses repeating itself. In Lavapiés, her amorous encounters are calculated as the beats of the *rueda*, never with Cuban men. Defying limiting binaries—*o el cubano porque la sangre llama o el español* by place of diaspora—she opts to arrive as a virgin, “sana y salva a los brazos de sus amantes étnicos” (safe and sound to the arms of her ethnic lovers). It is in sharing her body with whom she chooses, abstaining from the typical magnetism to a countryman or a Spaniard that she finds the power and the freedom to define herself. She is however, constantly drawn back to that evil dance with *los tópicos*, the stereotypes. Even though she walks the streets of Madrid pretending to be of another ethnicity, another nationality, another type of woman, her ruse only lasts as long as she is out of contact with the trained Spanish eye or *el cubaneo*—Cuban ambiances. She reflects, in an unpatriotic tone, about how being amongst Cubans is not only an act of returning to the island dynamic but an act of revisiting the imposition of suffocating labels that mark the vestiges of empire.

El cubaneo, ésta es la parte más jodida, el cubaneo. Llegaron los tópicos, se sentaron, y comenzaron a hablar más alto que nosotros. Llegaron los alardes, llegó la megalomanía. “Los cubanos somos los argentinos del Caribe”, porque tenemos... el mejor tabaco, las mejores mujeres, la mejor música, el mejor pueblo...En fin, terminamos a gritos, borrachos, hablando las mismas sandeces que si nos hubiésemos encontrado en un bar en la Habana. Comemierdurías. Gillipolleces, en español de España.⁴

⁴ Cubanness, this is the most awful part, Cubanness. The stereotypes arrived, they took a seat, and began to speak louder than us. The pretentiousness, delusional fantasies of grandeur. We Cubans are the Argentines of the Caribbean because we have the best cigars, the best women, the best music, the best people. We end up screaming, drunk talking the same nonsense as if we had run into one another at a bar in Havana. Nonsense.

Encounters such as these reinforce the instability of the immigrant subject—at one moment in her own world, the next drawn back to her homeland—and a typical trait of the trans-Atlantic condition. Constantly in flux, her experience defined by every movement, within or without that Cuban circle, it is only upon her return to Havana, degree in hand, objective achieved, that she allows herself to fall into *los tópicos*. She chooses to have sexual relations with a Spaniard at *el Malecón* (the Havana boardwalk), just like any *jinetera mulata* in her daily dance with tourism would do. By conquering the quintessential border that defines Cuban insularity, that delineates the island and contains within it its typical Cuban women, she is finally liberated from the borders of imperial patriarchy in her parallel lives. Back in Havana she thinks about “el estreno de su visado de entrada al mulatismo... pensando en el fastidio de ser mulata, ser joven, ser cubana, y haber vuelto a vivir en la ciudad de Siempre.” La *rueda* thus comes full circle and la maldita danza of the diaspora ends.

Parallel Worlds

Maldita danza not only creates parallels across the Atlantic between Havana’s *La Timba* and Madrid’s Lavapiés, it is also reminiscent of the world narrated in Alejo Carpentier’s *Lost Steps*. Both works rely on the diary genre to narrate the experiences of unnamed Cuban musicologists who travel to metropolitan cities in order to engage in work related to their fields. Dated entries provide the basic structure for Carpentier’s novel while entries identified by weeks (103 in total) and numbers (16 in all) give Díaz-Pimienta’s novel its structure, both works augmented by the narrator’s fragmented

recollections of the past and their respective meditations on art, culture, and history. While in Díaz Pimienta's novel the young female protagonist moves to Madrid to pursue a Master's degree in Musicology, the older male musicologist in Carpentier's novel travels from New York to the jungles of Latin America to conduct university-sponsored research on the mimetic origin of music. It is precisely the concept of mimesis that reaffirms the parallels between the musicologists' worlds. Although Díaz-Pimienta's protagonist does not actively seek to answer questions about the origins of music, she does theorize about gendered mimesis in relation to dance, specifically rueda de casino, and their melding into her stereotyped experiences in both Cuba and Spain. For the young mulata, sexual relations mimic dance and vice versa, all culminating in determining factors for the Cuban woman—she who dances is also capable of mimicking said movements in intimate spheres. Hers is a personal project of self-identification as it relates to music and mimesis while for the male musicologist it is a matter of detached investigation.

However, in addressing mimesis, both characters are thrust into completing respective mental journeys that present the reader with the age-old comparisons between civilization and barbarism. If Carpentier's musicologist travels in time to speak of man's life dating to creation—reminiscent of *Viaje a la semilla*—he inserts himself in that history in order to determine which world is his. As his mind wanders from the physical world of the barbaric (the Latin American jungle) to eras of civilization—the Renaissance, Antiquity, the Stone Age—he realizes that he needs the civilization from which he originates yet yearns for the barbarism (represented by his beloved Rosario) which he has encountered. For Díaz-Pimienta's musicologist, the journey to self-

definition is framed by the same dichotomy but her physical positioning is conversely relational to that of Carpentier's musicologist. She begins, physically, in a civilized Madrid and reverts to a barbaric Cuba the memory of which is protagonized by El Salvaje himself. Her journey to her origins, her memories of self as a child and subsequently as an adult in La Timba, are intrinsically tied to a savage man and the savage qualities attributed to the damned dance of rueda. Her sense of self dates back to the origins of the savage behavior the dance entailed and the act of sex related to it, vividly recalls reaching points of graphic intimacy with young men in Havana. She says,

Hasta que ellos metían las manos más allá del pubis, y comenzaban a bajar el blúmer, sudorosos, agitados, sí mami, ven, déjame un poco... lame la cabeza de la jicotea pero no dejas que entre en ella, vamos mulata, no seas mala, déjate, pero la mulata es mala, malísima, se aguanta el pantalón o se baja la saya, y comienza a reír con nerviosismo, todavía con el cuello de jicotea entre las manos, o entre los labios, ríe como una señorita, juega con lo prohibido como una señorita, cierra las piernas y controla la fiebre y el deseo como una señorita.⁵

In control of her body, her desires and her moves, she nonetheless mimics the game of seduction leading to sexual relations. As she pretends to play the part of a temptress who will inevitably give in to carnal desire, the act she puts on exhibits a form of mimesis described by French feminist Luce Irigaray as a form of resistance. In her essay "This Sex Which Is Not One," Irigaray argues for the process of resubmitting women to stereotypical views of women in order to call the views of themselves into question. This form of mimesis or strategic essentialism commits to the unfaithful repetition of stereotypical views. By imperfectly imitating stereotypes about themselves, women such

⁵ Alexis Díaz-Pimienta. *Maldita danza*. (Barcelona: Alba Editorial, 2002) 105.

as *La Musicóloga*, show these stereotypes and undermine them.⁶ Dancing to beat of her own song, she does not need to participate in *la rueda* to gain her sense of womanhood. By undertaking this form of mimesis, the border she imposes over her own body displaces Cuban manhood and scars their masculinity in a rehearsed role reversal. To heal their wounded macho masculinity,

La mejor forma de no desprestigiarse era alardear de habérsela templado claro, asere, bajo el laurel aquél, y está buenísima, vanagloriándose de un orgasmo inexistente, tremendo palo la hijita del pianista.⁷

Gaining a “reputation” through her ruse, she constructed a new identity for herself that marked her as “La Mulata Calentona que escogía muy bien a quién meterse,” despite being a virgin through her 25 years of age.⁸

As empowering as this strategy may have been at a given time in Cuba, she is nevertheless truly dislocated, concluding after her mental journey that neither in Peninsular civilization nor in the savage island does she belong as her Cuban experience with stereotypes and expectations of the racialized gendered body is mimicked in Spain. It is evident that she cannot escape the metaphorical steps that compose that damned cyclical dance of mimesis that repeats itself in Madrid. Unable to escape its tyranny she is not, like Carpentier’s musicologist, *dueña de sus pasos y (ni) los afínca donde quiera*. Her daily life is marred by the imposed sense of self, the stereotypes created at home and

⁶ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985). According to Irigaray, the very possibility of repeating a negative view unfaithfully suggests that women are something other than the view expressed. Irigaray repeats the views because she believes that overcoming harmful views of women cannot occur through simply ignoring the views. True to the methodology of psychoanalysis, she believes that negative views can only be overcome when they are exposed and demystified. When successfully employed, mimesis repeats a negative view-without reducing women to that view-and makes fun of it such that the view itself must be discarded.

⁷ Ibid 151.

⁸ Ibid.

reproduced abroad. Her tone reveals a bitterness born of the imposition of such stereotypes, a reluctant acceptance of the victimization of a racialized objectification and sexualization. An intellectual with a laudable past, she is now, as part of Madrid's Cuban diaspora, reduced to "a condom and a hymen" in Lavapiés. She concludes that her individuality is null; she is perceived as just another typical Cuban mulata and never allowed to forget it. Conscious of her own shortcomings, "una mulata arrítmica, zurda a la música, los oídos cuadrados, y los pies triangulares" (11), she is nonetheless "un tópico con largas trenzas y piel crepuscular y ojos enormes" (10). She is trapped in a vicious cycle of the chorus "ah, eres cubana" which serves as a repetitive element throughout the novel. The cyclical nature of things—stereotypes, treatment in Madrid, reactions to her Cuban origin, the casino dance, the constant ruminating over who she is and how she is perceived—marks the novel from its inception. There is a feeling that things will inevitably remain unchanged, inflexible, and stagnant despite the movement inherent in all things cyclical, the casino dance most evidently of all. It is precisely because the dance is interminable, because the possibility and plausibility of its endless roundabouts are allegorical of every other cyclic element in the novel, that the dance is wicked or evil. It does not allow the protagonist a moment of rest or escape from its constant movement that paradoxically remains still. Unlike Carpentier's protagonist, she cannot lose her pasos, steps symbolic of the retracing of the self to its origins, because they are not hers to lose. She is not in control of her being. It is constructed and re-constructed for her in an endless cycle. Carpentier's protagonist loses his physical steps along his journey through the Latin American jungle as well as his symbolic steps back to identifying with civilization because the steps were not predetermined for him, he made those physical

tracks himself and thus they were his to lose. As de Certeau's influential chapter in *The Practice of Everyday Life* entitled "A Walk in the City" suggests, it is the inevitable nature of walking, of step-taking through a chosen path to lose these steps in the act of forward movement. Physical retracing of routes is an impossible act as the research bound musicologist of Carpentier's novel learns upon his second trip to the jungle. In contrast, for *La Musicóloga* there is no escaping the steps that retrace her past to a savage Cuba laden with memories of El Salvaje, which in turn follow her forward into a savage diasporic experience in Madrid.

Lavapiés: The Other Madrid

«Cuando llegues a Madrid/
chulapa mía/
voy a hacerte emperatriz/
de Lavapiés/
y alfombrarte con claveles/
la Gran vía/
Y bañarte con vinillo de Jerez ».⁹

Maldita danza opens with a tone of frustration. Within the first sentence the female narrator communicates to her audience that three of her immutable qualities—her racial identity, her age, and her nationality—are nuisances that impede a pleasant experience as an exchange student in Spain. The geographic location is the only variable in this opening statement which leads the reader to ponder—would living in any other country, Cuba included, as a young, Cuban mulata be any different? As the novel

⁹ A Spanish popular song known as a "tonadilla," which dates back to the 18th century. While it is said to have begun in Madrid drawing from Italian opera influences, these rhyming songs with accompanying dances later took on a more Andalusian tone. By the end of the 18th century "tonadillas" were synonymous with "la canción andaluza tradicional" (traditional Andalusian song). This song promises a girl in traditional Madrilian garb (chulapa) that she will become the empress of the Madrid's Lavapiés neighborhood.

continues, alternating between a third person narrator and the protagonist's first person account of her life, the parallels established between experiences lived in both Spain and Cuba overwhelmingly point to a "no." Her life across the Atlantic, minus the immigrant status that defines her there, mirrors her life on the island. She is subject to the male gaze which exoticizes and objectifies her because of her physical appearance. She thus falls victim of the fetish in the Freudian sense where the male holds on too tightly to the object of difference also the object of desire—here the Cuban mulata's body—which keeps colonial models of the fantasy of Otherness operating in a nostalgic fashion. The insecurities of being an atypical mulata—a late bloomer who lost her virginity at 25 and who never learned how to dance as was inculcated throughout her childhood—all resurface, giving way to the opening pages of this novel, when the protagonist is simply asked to dance. Marred by expectations she could not fulfill in Cuba, she is unable to escape the same expectations once in Spain. The only difference between the then there and the here now is the identity marker "cubana." The protagonist is obviously Cuban in Cuba but in the multi-ethnic neighborhood she inhabits, her origin is a mystery to others with endless possibilities. As she recounts,

En Lavapiés, no hay día que no me miren o me pregunten algo. Los marroquíes, los iraquíes, los españoles. Sobre todo las mujeres. Me miran mucho. Supongo que me creen árabe. Incluso me han hablado en árabe. Y me sonrían tontamente.¹⁰

As promising as this anonymity may seem for someone who seeks to be left alone—free from suffocating labels and their accompanying expectations—it proves fallible. She nonetheless has a 'typical' experience that any typical immigrant woman from Cuba would have. She is unable to escape the omnipresent tyranny of stereotypes because "tus

¹⁰Díaz Pimienta 21.

amigos y tus vecinos y la cuota de desconocidos que te corresponden se encargarán de recordártelo a toda hora.”¹¹ Once identified, *La Musicóloga* is subject to the chorus-like phrase “Ajá, eres cubana,” which in differing tones with varying inflections and loaded with inquisitory as well as exclamatory sentiments, inevitably leads to conversations about salsa, salsa dancing, mojitos and Castro-centric political inquiries. As this seemingly natural cycle occurs—her identification as a Cuban woman, followed by the oh’s and ah’s, followed by the laundry list of typical associations and questions—the conclusive phase is also predictable. It is marked by the presence of old family pictures. Bhabha’s observations in *The Location of Culture* about the mutual implication of the colonized in the identity of the colonizer—which reasserts itself cyclically sheds light on the photographs episode. These visual memories, evidence of the familial ties that bind Cubans and Spaniards serve as nostalgic artifacts of the colonial condition. The protagonist narrates the culminating phase of this cycle in the following manner:

Hasta que dejan caer sobre mi mesa fotos de sus abuelos, tíos, primos, sobrinos, hermanos, todos con trajes y sombreros antiguos, todos amarillentos, misteriosos, intentando moverse también al ritmo de la música, pero tan incapaces como sus descendientes, unos posando junto a un Chevrolet, otros bebiendo junto al Malecón, la mayoría con sus rostros neo colombinos y sonrisas estoicas, estirando las manos desde la cartulina y gritándome a coro

Ah, ¿eres cubana?

As if every Spaniard had a photograph to demonstrate a familial tie to Cuba and its people, the Musicologist’s description is itself evidence of the ways in which stereotypes rooted in and a product of trans-Atlantic colonial crossings are naturally built into discourses about Hispano-Cuban relations and its participants. With a centuries-long history of migration, immigration, and political and economic ties, it not surprising for

¹¹ Ibid., 10.

her to perceive that every Spaniard has a relative who has somehow had some connection to Cuba. Narrating her repetitive encounters with these palpable sites of historical memory, these photographs whose pictured characters are almost alive, extending a ghostly hand from the collective past into her individual present, is suggestive of the workings of imperial nostalgia's family trope. As Anne McClintock explains in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, "The family becomes at one and the same time, both the *organizing figure* for national history and its *antithesis*."¹² By eradicating the notion of a discontinuous national history and its heterogeneous constitutions, the family trope serves as an inclusive element where Cuba, an island its people conquered, is not just one more territory under imperial rule in a history of unparalleled Spanish domination but a foreign entity that is constructed as familial and domestic. Cuba is that long lost relative that is dear to the national family and highlights the dynamics of ambivalence that Bhabha observes in the paradoxical qualities of Otherness. In this sense the family trope is akin to the stereotype as it functions in dual opposition to identify a marked difference between Cubans and Spaniards while domesticating difference in order to reflect its immanent (genealogical) sameness. As McClintock suggests, the family trope can be a space of multiplicity that not only reveals but generates hybridity and exposes transnational trajectories. *La Musicóloga*, hit by a barrage of photographs—evidence of the specters of the colonial past to use the words of Joseba Gabilondo and Luis Martín-Cabrera—is told that while her difference is perceptible and marks her immigrant experience, she is not just any other immigrant. The evidence points at a bigger connection with hints of a homecoming.

¹² McClintock, Anne. *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, And Postcolonial Perspectives*. (Minnesota: University of Minneapolis, 1997) 91.

As unnamed yet familiar relatives, all generic, all close and distant alike—grandfathers, uncles, cousins, nephews and brothers—she is both part of the family and she is estranged. Taunted by the ghosts of the colonial past, each inquiry and the genealogical line that is re-traced to Cuba speaks of the specter of Columbus, where the legacy of conquest is perpetuated and the discourses tied to it—the unifying family trope—continue to identify the relationship between Cuba and Spain. History repeats itself in these episodes where visual reminders—photographs—serve as a palpable media for specters to resurface. As these instances repeat themselves, both the protagonist and Cuba are caught in a cyclical reliving of a colonial past that remains relevant in an end of the century Cuba, and for Cubans who immigrate to a new Spain whose relationship with the island is anything but new. Hence, as the tonadilla with which the chapter opens suggests, upon arrival in Lavapiés, the *Musicóloga*, part of the extended national family, will receive special treatment not afforded others. She will be made into a metaphorical empress to highlight her worthiness of such distinction, to serve as a reminder of her place within a repetitive colonial order.

Stylistically, the novel is a very personal one. *La Musicóloga* speaks to her audience through thoughts she jots down in a diary. Choosing such a personal and personalized format to recount the daily experiences and sentiments she lives speaks to a desire to records her daily happenings in Spain's capital city, the discontent with two years of her life in what would be considered paradise for someone escaping Cuba's Special Period. Her fervor to do undo the ills of the stereotype is partly responsible for this discontent and it is indicative of the anxiety that stereotypes produce as described by

Bhabha. He maintains that the stereotype is not only assertive insofar as it is an aggressive argument as to the way the world is but it is also a nervous condition. The protagonist certainly demonstrated this nervous quality throughout her time in Madrid:

Los dos años de Máster en Madrid hubieran sido hermosos, intensamente hermosos, si ella no hubiera sido demasiado mulata, demasiado joven, demasiado cubana, si incluso no hubiera tenido esa obsesión por todo lo que aparentaba, por vencer a los jodidos tópicos. Su vida madrileña se tornó una batalla dispareja: ella sola contra toda una marea social, psicológica, ontológica, ella sola ante un razonamiento que se torna manía, una manía que se vuelve militancia, una militancia que se convierte en obcecación casi patológica y mucho más en Lavapiés.¹³

This decade of Cuban need coincided with the Quinto Centenario celebrations which reinserted the culture of conquest into the Spanish imaginary and lexicon. As Spain celebrates a lauded centuries-long history of conquest and imperial dominance, the remnants of such discourses come into play in places such as Lavapiés, a melting pot sector of Madrid—the metropolis now open to immigration. It serves as a reminder that the other is still not integrated into Spanish society.

If *El diario de Colón* archived for the Spanish Court of the 15th century the preliminary sights and sounds, the impressions and understandings of a new world and its people to be conquered, *Maldita danza* cedes the narrative voice to a colonized female body that centuries later speaks to a similar objectification and understanding of the Other on Spanish soil. If Columbus and his men were on a discovery mission, the novel's protagonist is on a similar one as she sets out to narrate her own search for identity in the eyes of the conquerors. In this fight against *lo típico, el tópico*, which becomes a leitmotif throughout the novel, the narrator bears witness to an imperial nostalgia that is latent in

¹³ Díaz Pimienta 177.

1990s Spain, a nostalgia whose deeply rooted stereotypes mar her existence as a Cuban mulata in Spain's capital city and which she aims to dismantle.

Su obsesión por desdoblarse se volvió en una asignatura extra, de un Máster extra, se volvió un pie forzado recurrente
seré mulata pero no buena amante, seré musicóloga pero no bailadora, seré joven pero no jinetera, seré cubana pero no disidente, seré licenciada en Musicología pero no Catedrática en Tropicología.¹⁴

Employing literary transvestism and the mode of displaced dialogues, Alexis Díaz-Pimienta cedes the narrative voice to a Cuban female musicologist from Havana's Timba neighborhood. Although the novel recounts the experiences of the protagonist living in Madrid during the 1990s, it quickly becomes an incessant trans-Atlantic journey facilitated by memories. As continuous narrative time is interrupted by flashbacks, the reader is taken back to her childhood and teenage years in Cuba as often as he or she is brought back to her life in the present time in Spain. Set in the oscillating, gray zone of the Musicologist's thoughts, the novel takes place in two seemingly picturesque neighborhoods of capital cities on either side of the Atlantic: La Timba (Havana) and Lavapiés (Madrid). As the reader joins the protagonist in her circular journey, the boomerang effect that is produced speaks to the dislocation, the absence of rootedness typical of the diasporic subject that she experiences in her quotidian living. In speaking of such an effect, the suspension factor is key—the boomerang never touches the ground and thus the constant movement from the point of origin to the point of destination while defined can be blurred and attest to an instability of place that is akin to that which the immigrant subject experiences. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation, this nebulous zone of suspension, of a constant defining and redefining of points, is

¹⁴ Ibid 178.

synonymous with the trans-Atlantic. The Musicologist's existence lacks rootedness; her life in Madrid cannot be lived without reverting to a past in Havana, without retracing steps and memories and events that lived in another time in another place, resurface in the diaspora. Hers is a classic example of Søren Kierkegaard's philosophy that *Life is lived forward but understood backward*.

The first memory her life in Madrid conjures is that of her childhood days at school recess in La Timba. The flashback is spurred by Spaniards who, loosening their ties and carelessly tossing their hats into the air in an undisclosed bar in the capital city, are eager to be taught the ways of Cuban dancing by this native whose skills are sure to please. Once vividly placed at recess, it becomes evident that it was in that social space within the larger educational institution that dancing rueda de casino was such an integral part of the Cuban learning experience. Unlike any other game of hopscotch or marbles that might be common in a school's playground, this dance was more than just an innocent form of entertainment amongst kids. It is described as a whirlwind devilish demon dance (*danza demoníaca*) where children turned arachnids, octopuses and medusas partake in rhythmic webs that tangled everyone who bears witness to it—students, professors, service workers. The protagonist perceives it as an act of exclusion at the hands of dehumanized *compañeros*, schoolmates, who in perpetuating the daily wicked ritual alienate her more and more from the typical Cuban experience. The reader quickly learns that for the protagonist, to be Cuban is to be a *casinera*, a dancer who because she is mulata should dance superbly, with a natural grace for pelvic movements and agility on her dancing feet. Her blonde haired, green-eyed classmate can move to the music. Her white freckle-faced, nappy-haired *jabá* classmate can easily execute the

caller's commands. Amidst the sexually explicit partner switching the dance entails her indigenous looking classmate has her breasts caressed by a boy's elbow, and the new girl—a buck toothed *zamba* of African and Indian ancestry all willingly and successfully participate in this spontaneous yet calculated child's play that marks the protagonist well into her mid-twenties.

This flashback illustrates an example of episodic memory that as Ulric Neisser explains in *The Remembering Self: Construction and Accuracy in Self-Narrative* forms part of the protagonist's life narrative, significant insofar as they are a way of self-definition. He says, "Conceptions of narrative often lead us to emphasize our own 'agency' (the effect of choices we made ourselves), but they can occasionally produce 'victimicy' as well."¹⁵ What *La Musicóloga* narrates is the experience of the victim who is haunted by the trauma of a recurring event over which she has no control. She chooses not to partake in the dancing that has a fixed presence in her everyday childhood thus exercising her agency but she is nonetheless helpless insofar as the choices made by the others—her classmates, the cultural unknowns that drive the damned dance into the Cuban educational experience. The only non-participant among her classmates, the Musicologist was the only girl on the sideline, tapping her foot, painstakingly aware not only of her lack of rhythm and dancing capacity but of her lack of femininity and Cubanness. As she recalls, that recess episode is filled with the caller's interjections, the most repetitive of which is the command to execute the move "yogur" that requires the interlocking of knees and the close proximity of the dancer's genitalia with that of the other. The longer each song ran, the more commands that were shouted, the more the

¹⁵ Ulric Neisser. *The Remembering Self: Construction and Accuracy in The Self-Narrative*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press:1994) 9.

young bodies moved to the beat and rubbed up against each other in swift style, the more dancing becomes synonymous with the sexual act. Thus, for the young and impressionable dancing outcast, her ironic inability to move to the sounds of *timba*—although she is a *timbera*, from the Timba neighborhood—, her inability to showcase her body with content and confidence led her to think herself incapable of having sexual relations.

Therefore, it is no surprise that the jump in narrative time from that afternoon recess session in the schoolyard lands the reader at a future time when the protagonist utters the words “Sin baile no hay sexo” to three psychologists on separate occasions. Following their responses to her—all confirming that one did not necessarily constitute the other—she begins to narrate her first sexual experience which she has named the Rebirth (Renacimiento). As memories overlap with one other, the reader learns of the importance that the protagonist’s traumatic encounter with her copulating father during her childhood had for her self-identification. This realization of the genital difference between self and parental unit is reflective of Freudian psychoanalysis’ castration anxiety which refers to an unconscious fear of penile loss originating during the phallic stage of sexual development. Here, this anxiety is in reference to a female (unlike Freud’s studies) and thus takes on the character of symbolic castration anxiety. *La Musicóloga*’s fear of being dominated—by the male gaze, by societal expectations, by stereotypes—leads her to conserve and prize her virginity for so long. Her “belated and melancholic” rebirth is thus symptomatic of psychological repression, by which she repels her own desires and impulses towards pleasurable instincts. The cause of said repression, Freud argues, is an external force that puts itself in contrast with desire, threatening to cause suffering if the

desire is satisfied. That force, in *La Musicóloga*'s case is the societal stereotype and societal expectation of la mulata. Her repressive response to the threat is to exclude the desire from her consciousness until she sees the threat subside. It is a defense mechanism. For this reason, her first sexual encounter is an uncomfortable one with El Salvaje (the Savage) and his properly named penis, El Falo whose "tribal patience" she found to be unnatural for a man so experienced in the art of sex. He and his personified penis were nonetheless patient enough to, interchangeably, coach her through her rebirth despite stating "but I haven't danced rueda de casino yet" and blurting out the chorus-like, "but I don't know how to dance".¹⁶ The sexual encounter was a moment not only of losing her virginity but also of losing her sense of self as a Cuban woman notably different from all the others who in engaging in sexual activity/dancing from a young age were victims of the male gaze and its damning stereotypes.

She goes on to describe herself as a double entity since having the childhood experience, an "I" that knows itself to have another self, which is aptly reflected in the changes in narrative voice throughout the novel. What she narrates is demonstrative of Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic mirror stage whereby she recognizes the distinction between herself and her father as well as her own mirror image. It is the stage where the emergence of sexual desires occurs alongside the advent of self image that gives her a sense of unified self and social acculturation.¹⁷ *La Musicóloga* thus seems to never outgrow the stage of acknowledged otherness that began with her father and that continued in Cuban courtyards through her teenage years, into the diaspora in Madrid.

¹⁶ Diaz Pimienta 11, 13.

¹⁷ Jacques Lacan. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I", in *Écrits: A Selection*. (London: Routledge Classics, 2001) 5.

La Musicóloga learned many things from that life-altering day when she earned her perceived right of passage into womanhood, perhaps more than at those recess sessions in her childhood, but the lesson that was perhaps most revealing, as she revealed her sexual purity and her uneasiness with an act that she wanted to undertake but was reluctant to, is that stereotypes are faulty. She thought herself unable to perform the sexual act because of her inexperience with dancing, yet she completed the act. She thought El Salvaje just that—a sexual beast that would rock her world or at the very least inject it with some *casino* spirit—and he fell short. As he explained to her that he too was a dance virgin despite his fame for being an expert in matters of pelvic thrusting both on the dance floor and in the bedroom, that “los tópicos son tópicos,” she understood that stereotypes didn’t have to be determinants—not in Cuba and certainly not years later in Spain.

Return to the Seed

Eventually, the cyclical nature of the novel makes it inevitable for *La Musicóloga*, whose stay in Madrid was conditioned by her studies at the Spanish Conservatory, to return home to La Timba. Like any other visa holder, she could have found a way to stay in Madrid, to avoid returning to the reality of a Special Period Cuba. In a rather abrupt manner in her penultimate chapter, the protagonist blurts out, “Me voy para el carajo, no resisto Madrid, no aguanto un día más.” Reverting to the laundry list mode of narration presented in the novel’s exposition, she justifies her decision by saying,

Ya acabé el Máster y mi trabajo aquí ha pasado un poco inadvertido; además he conocido un mundo que me ignora, al que en el fondo no le interesa conocerme. Le hubiera interesado si yo hubiese moldeado mi manera de ser. Lo único que voy

a echar de menos es el barrio..... Me encanta Lavapiés. Me recuerda a la Habana Vieja...¹⁸

It seems contradictory that she would reflect on missing the place that reminded her of her difference, that recast her in the stereotypical roles afforded Cuban women. Lavapiés was nonetheless also a place where she could to a certain extent hide her true origin, amidst the melting pot of cultures. It was a Madrid away from Madrid, a safe haven from the greater metropolis where her encounters with Spaniards were more heart wrenching than her encounters with ethnic Othered subjects within the neighborhood. In setting up a final comparison between two worlds that are parallel but not equal to one another, she confirms that, as has been argued, she yearns for a happy fusion of a civilized jungle or a barbaric civilization, interchangeably a modern, diverse Lavapiés or a classic, traditional Old Havana. Instead of returning to her family and her home in La Timba, she chooses to invest her Spanish currency in accommodations in El Vedado, Havana's bustling modern downtown area. Returning to Cuba in the likes of a foreigner, a tourist, it is evident that she cannot be the same Musicologist who left two years earlier, marked by her experience abroad yet, in that damned circular dance, she relives a situation similar to that which leads to her first memory of Cuba while in Madrid. Snapping back at a Spanish tourist who has called her attention by hurling a mix of the typical Cuban monikers of "mami, ricura, mulata, nena" with the typically Spanish "guapa" her way, she meets Jota. He asked, in a manner identical to that which she had heard a thousand times in Madrid, "eres cubana, ¿no?" And the protagonist, far from being offended and recalling the list of encounters where stereotypes were to follow said question, found

¹⁸ Díaz Pimienta 218.

herself initiating her first pleasant encounter with a Spanish man who happened to be from Lavapiés. As her two parallel worlds magically fuse into this closing encounter of the novel, both she and Jota amidst the seemingly natural flirtatious moment, could not help but address those taunting tópicos that not only followed the Musicologist from Cuba to Spain and back to the island but those that Jota knew to be associated with Spanish males. The text reads,

Y ambos tuvieron que aceptar que aquella forma de reír no era inocente, que el brillo en las miradas de ambos no era virgen, que aquellas mutuas sonrisas preconizaban un fortuito enterramiento de sus respectivas militancias psicológicas, ella enterrado su repulsión al sexo ibérico, él enterrando su repelencia a una españolidad sobreentendida.

As if they were singing to one another a chorus unheard by either before, a contrapunteo of sorts that relied on a repeating phrase liberating them both from the tyranny of these tópicos, they confessed their atypical intentions:

Que yo no vine a Cuba a ser Don Juan Tenorio

Que yo no fui a Madrid a huir del comunismo

Que yo no vine a Cuba a hartarme de mojitos y a enamorar mulatas en el malecón

Que yo no quiero estar legitimando cada cuatro pasos mi relación contigo

Que yo no

Que yo no

Que yo tampoco¹⁹

¹⁹ Ibid 239.

The exchange is a gesture in undoing another stereotype, that which comes to define the relationship between the biracial Cuban woman and the European male during the Special Period. If the stereotype is understood, as Bhabha understands it, as form of knowledge in addition to a form of identification that vacillates between that which is always in place and that which must be anxiously repeated, the conversation attempts to break the cycle by contesting the knowledge that is firmly in place.²⁰ That is to say, by each character negating the established knowledge that accompanies their role (Spaniard as Don Juan Tenorio seeking mulata for a good time, Cuban mulata seeks refuge from communism in Spain and now seeks a Spaniard to rescue her from Cuba permanently) they de-stabilize the stereotype. In layman's terms, they break the metaphoric mold. As they got to know one another beyond what they were conditioned to think, to believe, to use as criteria for judging one another, as she, a Cuban mulata atypically treated him, a Spanish male to a beer, they subverted the unspoken rules of interaction; they halted the stereotype. In their own world, ready to plunge into what seems natural physical contact born of inherent chemistry, they forgot about the real world of assumptions, expectations, and tópicos that surrounded them in Havana. Reality was that "ante los ojos de la ciudad era tan solo un turista mulatista, un Pepe más con una mulatona."²¹ It was the accusing manner of Cuban authorities who convinced of the evident accosting of a foreigner at her mulata hands interrupted what was otherwise a perfectly genuine encounter. As Jota walked away to prevent further complications, she felt herself returning to that initial scene in Madrid's bars where she was drowning in tópicos with no feasible escape. She

²⁰ Bhabha 66.

²¹ Díaz Pimienta 241.

was, now at home, once again trapped by that damned circular dance. Left with a warning about avoiding bothering tourists in the future, *La Musicóloga* walks, takes steps not to be retraced or recovered in a Carpentierian manner, straight into the arms of Jota. She pulled him into the center of Havana's streets, where a makeshift dance floor near el Malecón was plagued by Cubans moving to the rhythms of timba, and danced with him as she had never done. Rhythmless and out of sync with one another they made their way to the center of the floor, a spectacle for all to see and she confessed her desire to engage in sexual intercourse with him engulfed by the rueda formed by those street dancers. At the seawall that physically separated her world from his, her island existence from his Peninsular one, two worlds that for her had been in every sense of the word really just one trans-Atlantic world, they copulated. In a scene reminiscent of rampant 1990s sex tourism in Havana, *La Musicóloga* seems to play into the cult of *amulatamiento* that she has fervently been fighting in both Madrid and her short time back on the island, a cult described in the following manner:

El mulatismo no era una simple concepción racial, era más bien una especie de actitud insular de fin de siglo... Todas querían parecer mulatas, andar como mulatas, hablar mulatamente, porque la cáscara canela auguraba no se sabía qué satisfacción visual, qué embrujo táctil, una secular propensión a la cadencia y a la sensualidad, a ritos danzarios que a su vez insinuaban ceremonias coitales. Y contra el tópico del amulatamiento sólo quedaba *La Musicóloga*...²²

As contradictory as her final steps in the novel may seem, this last bastion of the strife against the tópico once again exhibits traits of Irigaray's mimesis. Empowered to make changes in her gendered subjectivity in Lavapiés, her amorous encounters are, calculated as the beats of the rueda, never with Cuban men. It is only upon her return to Havana,

²² Ibid 76.

degree in hand, that she has sex with a Spaniard at *el Malecón*, just like any *jinetera mulata* in her daily dance with tourism would do. Conquering the quintessential border that defines Cuban insularity, she is finally liberated from the borders of patriarchy in her parallel lives. While she engages in the same acts that any other Cuban woman, guided by the *amulatamiento* craze and its accompanying stigmas, she only mimics the act associated with *jineteras* and as such does not reproduce those typical acts nor does she embody their stereotypes. In an atypical silence where there was no monetary exchange, where promise of an exit visa was absent, where promises of material goods was absent, where typical expectations were absent, they walked away from one another. Thus both former Conquistador and conquered subject disavow the sex tourism paradigm, the central tópico that surrounds the Spanish male-Cuban female relation. Walking back to her place of lodging, her steps new, those of a subversive woman finally liberated from stereotypes and stigmas, she is nonetheless still captive of that damned circular dance as she thinks about “el fastidio de ser mulata, ser joven, ser cubana y haber vuelto a vivir en la ciudad de siempre.”²³

²³ Ibid 245.

Jineteras and El Maldito Jineteo

*Yo me dejé arrastrar por la desesperación y poco a poco empecé a convertirme en una jinetera, entré en el mercado de la carne fresca de Castro.*²⁴

In a style reminiscent of Gabriel García Márquez's *Crónica de una muerte anunciada*, Lisette Bustamante's 2003 novel *Jineteras* employs a fusion of journalistic investigation and the chronicle genre in order to tell the story of Adis Pérez's life. A 27-year old Cuban *jinetera* who found her escape from a 1990s Special Period Cuba in the arms of an 80-year old lover, Adis Pérez's new life in Vienna, Austria, was not what she had imagined. Her unexpected fate abroad is exposed at the opening of the novel as the narrator, an unnamed Cuban investigative reporter living in Madrid, reflects on the death of the young woman before leading the reader through the re-creation of Adis's life and the crime that took her life. She says,

Abandonaste el mapa del país creyendo que encontrarías los sueños que dejaron muchos años en que fuiste muriendo lentamente. Hoy no sé cómo homenajear tu nombre y tu calvario, ni cómo entender tu vida. Adis, tú también cubana y acosada por la realidad, emprendiste el camino de la muerte desde aquella primera vez que saliste a buscar al del más allá, al de ese mundo prohibido y anhelado por muchas que, como tú, querían ser reina en un país sin reinos.²⁵

An *ajiaco* of apostrophe, homage, social protest and female solidarity along nationalist lines, the narrator writes *la jinetera* into the Cuban national narrative not from the perspective of "los hombres que visten de verde olivo y que se han inventado la

²⁴ Lisette Bustamante. *Jineteras*. (Barcelona: Ediciones Altera, 2003) 79.

²⁵ Ibid 11.

historia de Cuba” but from that of a woman who speaks for the subaltern, Adis. She reports the specifics that led to the Cuban woman’s death while commenting on how Adis’s life as a *jinetera* is a direct result of a national history of Castro’s failed socio-political movement that, in her reporting eyes, is ultimately responsible for the metaphoric death of the *jinetera* generation during the Special Period. In doing so, she constructs a counter-narrative of emancipatory agency that working from the already revealed fate returns to roots that disturb the ways that the imagined community essentializes the gendered subject. The production of this novel fits patterns in the journalistic sphere both on and off the island that seeks to gather testimony from *jineteras* in order to expose both the difficulties and the dangers of sex tourism. It is most akin, despite genre, to journalist Amir Valle’s 2006 text by the same name, *Jineteras*, a compilation of case studies of women, very often belonging to the professional class, who are forced to engage in prostitution in order to survive in Cuban society.²⁶ More recently, Spanish author Jordi Sierra i Fabra has taken up the subject of *jineteras* through a fictive journalistic lens in the novel *La noche de la jinetera* (2010).²⁷ Rosa Miriam Elizalde—a columnist for the Cuban newspaper *Juventud Rebelde*—has also contributed to the journalistic work on the topic in her non-fiction books *Jineteros en la Habana* (1997) and *Flores Desechables: Prostitución en Cuba* (1998). The 1990s *jinetera* phenomenon has also inspired fictive works in Cuban authors such as Pedro Juan

²⁶ Amir Valle is a Cuban journalist like Lissette Bustamante. Together with Cuban writers José Mariano Torralbas, Alberto Garrido, Marcos González, José Manuel Poveda y Radhis Curí, he created the literary group Seis del Ochenta from 1984 to the late 1990s. From Berlin, Germany, where he resides, he is the director of the digital Madrid-based literary magazine *OtroLunes*.

²⁷ Karla Suárez. “Anniversary” as seen in Berg, Mary G. Ed. *Open Your Eyes and Soar: Cuban Women Writing Now*. (Buffalo, New York: White Pine Press 2003).

Gutierrez's *Un rey en la Habana* (1999) and Karla Suárez short story "Anniversary" (2003). Sprinkling the text with references to other Cuban literary works—namely Oscar Hijuelo's *Empress of the Splendid Sea* (1999) and Abilio Estévez's *Tuyo es el reino* (1999) and *Palacios distantes* (2002)—Bustamante achieves the writing of the gendered self into the canon of the search for *lo cubano* and Cuban identity beyond *los muros del Malecón*. In so doing, the author dismantles the narrative that women in Castro's Cuba can only *resolver*—achieve their freedom from the state, from poverty, from gender subordination—through *el jineteo*. Adis and the women like her who suffer the daily repercussions of the Fatherland that hustles them in their political and economic games of neo-colonialism don't have to "esperar en el muro de los placeres" to be saved from erasure in national narrative because this Cuban female journalist has re-centered their subjectivity. Interweaving facts about Adis's death gathered from Austrian and Spanish newspapers as well as interviews Bustamante demonstrates both the pedagogical and performative nature of national identity, as Bhabha has argued. By building Adis's life through the coupling of fact and fiction she exposes the theatricality of national identity as individuals are cast into tales that suit the needs of those in power. As racism and sexism function together in a historical system of complimentary exclusions, Balibar explains that the polymorphism of racism makes connections between practices of social normalizations and exclusion. Both on the island and in Spain, Cuban women are imagined and excluded according to the stereotypes mentioned which become normalized. As expressed by *La Musicóloga* in Díaz Pimienta's novel, "Tú, jodida, moviendo el pie de un lado para el otro, fingiendo un ritmo inexistente, tú el prototipo de

la mulata tropical y cálida, sola (sin bailar)...y sin baile no hay sexo.”²⁸ An artistic act of patriotism, these novels *luchan contra el tópico* that pigeonholes *la cubana mulata* by asserting that there is more to *lo cubano* and *la cubana* than *el bailoteo* and *el jineteo*.

As cursed by her displacement in the national performance of a gendered race identity as *La Musicóloga*, the protagonist of Lissette Bustamante’s *Jineteras* is trapped in *la maldita danza del jineteo*.²⁹ The victim of “la condición de esclavos del sexo-dólar en que viven en Cuba... donde lo más importante es resolver,” Adis’s yearning to escape the insularity and the patriarchy that imprisons her body in the business of Havana’s sex tourism leads her into the arms of an elderly Austrian misogynist.³⁰ With the illusion of catching a glimpse of the sea from the other side of *el Malecón*, of being “la Emperatriz del Caribe en Europa,” the twenty seven year old *jinetera mulata*, “esa mezcla explosiva que muchos hombres buscan” fulfills her fantasy by exploiting the very chains that enslave her. Determined to leave Cuba she plays the role of “la emperatriz de la belleza canela sabiendo que lleva el ritmo en su interior y que ésa sera su arma para desafiar Viena a golpes de miradas, cintura y ritmo.”³¹ Caught in a repeating cycle of subordination at the hands of the *abuelo*, it is only in death that she finds her freedom.

²⁸ Díaz Pimienta 14.

²⁹ Jineteo refers to the culture of jinetería. *Jinetera* is Cuban slang for a sex tourism prostitute in Castro’s Cuba.

³⁰ Bustamante 100.

³¹ *Ibid* 155.

A Trans-Atlantic Journey: Re-tracing Adis's Lost Steps

The narrator's investigative journey to retrace the life and death of Adis Pérez is rooted in a mission whose objective is twofold. As an immigrant Cuban woman with a seemingly fruitful journalistic career in Madrid over the past twelve years, she describes the need to reveal the human face behind the *jinetas*' façade, a façade unknown to most as a result of what she considers Cuban media censorship. Taking Adis's case as an exemplary one, she aims to unmask the realities of an economically downtrodden island whose governing body not only creates the need for prostitution but facilitates its proliferation with its own economic advantage at the forefront. Adis becomes the segway into an exposé about a government that not only fails its people politically, economically and socially but as the narrator concludes, morally. She clearly delineates how in Special Period Cuba, the government becomes the pimp and *jinetas* that due to necessity sell their bodies to survive a situation that the government created become their tricks. The narrator successfully extracts a confession that highlights this point of view in an interview she conducts with Zulema, a former *jinetas* who worked the streets of Havana with Adis:

Dentro de Cuba no valemos nada, pero a la hora de lo que yo le llamo la venta, sí. Un hombre de cualquier rincón del mundo tiene que comprarnos al Estado cubano. Son unos hijos de puta tanto ellos como los del Gobierno que están muy campantes inaugurando hoteles con los mismos que nosotros después nos templamos para que estén contentos y enamorados de Cuba.³²

³² Ibid 115.

It is thus her misión to unmask what she deems the imposed sex tourism industry to which Adis has fallen prey in an effort to denounce and perhaps dismantle its underlying infrastructure.

As she retraces the steps that led Adis from Havana to Austria, the narrator harps on the difficulty of gathering her facts despite her fervent reading of articles published in Spain and in Austria about the murder-suicide. Cognizant of the fact that such news will never make it to Cuba's headlines, that the government would not and could not taint the sex tourism industry by exposing the dangers of marriages of convenience, she had to gather the Cuban side of the story elsewhere. Although she does not live in either of the two countries involved in the events, the reader quickly learns that despite the frustration and anxiety that that immutable condition produces, Madrid and its Cuban diasporic community are of prime importance in finding Adis's lost steps; both are the missing links in this trans-Atlantic strategy. As she walks the streets of Spain's capital city in search of a starting point, she is mentally transported to Cuba's capital city, creating parallel worlds reminiscent of José Donoso's *El jardín al lado*. She describes her experience in the following way,

Deambulo por Madrid con la ilusión de que alguna piedra me cuente tu vida. Cierro los ojos para imaginar tu andar por las calles habaneras, tus largas noches de espera por la llegada de aquel extranjero que te llevaría a conocer una parte del mundo. Cómo conociste a tu verdugo; cuántos tocaron tu cuerpo, cuántos orgasmos disfrutaste y cuántos fingiste.³³

Through the act of walking, of moving physically forward but mentally backward in the fashion of Díaz-Pimienta's and Carpentier's musicologists, this journalist seeks to create a metaphoric path to the truth about her subject. Knowing the importance afforded to

³³ Ibid 15-6.

Afro-Cuban santería by the narrator, her reference to seeking a rock of knowledge in Madrid that would serve as a gateway to her story takes on more meaning in the trans-Atlantic context. Within santería rocks are thought to open doors to occult powers. For her to associate Madrid's streets and elements that belong to Madrid with a truth about Adis, a young Cuban *jinetera* who never touched Spanish soil alludes to a rooted sameness between both cities and its people. While she walks the streets of Madrid she envisions Adis walking the streets of Havana seeking her fate among the foreigners lining the city's Malecón. A place unrelated to the events, a place that changes with every step she takes as de Certeau theorized, bears witness to the process of writing a new historical narrative; Adis's story, that of "otra víctima de la manipulación gubernamental del sexo, otra mercancía que ofrecía su cuerpo para sobrevivir," compiled and written from Madrid will counter the story of an island that methodically disguises the exploitation of its women.³⁴

Bogged by the anxiety of fruitless avenues of investigation, it is the diasporic Cuban community that provides the narrator with the stepping stone she sought. After her contemplative walk through the city's streets she returned home to light candles for Adis, to place glasses of water in altars and commend her spirit following the rituals of believers in the santería faith. Thus religious in her own right, she was invited to a *misa espiritual*³⁵ to be celebrated in the Ventas sector of Madrid. The ceremony would be at

³⁴ Ibid 15.

³⁵ A mass celebrated in santería dedicated to the spirits of the dead. Through a medium ordained in the faith, spirits communicate with those in attendance. These masses are often celebrated with the purpose of gathering facts about the deceased including how the death occurred, if the person's spirit is at peace and if there is anything those left behind should know in order to help the spirit find eternal peace/rest (*luz y progreso*).

the hands of a *santera mayor*³⁶ who thanks to a viable Cuban community in the city had resolved the logistics of a formal government approved invitation³⁷ to have her travel from Cuba to officiate the ceremony. The event, indicative of Cuban networks recreating traditions in the diaspora, also speaks to the ways in which the Cuban family maintains its ties, albeit through religion, despite the immigrant experience. She describes it in the following way,

Aquella misa o fiesta de los espíritus sería muy especial, rendirían un homenaje a los que han muerto en el camino de la supervivencia, pero sobre todo por una ahijada.³⁸ A esta celebración asistiría una santera recién llegada de Cuba que había venido a Madrid para ver a algunos de sus ahijados. Traía consigo el ‘ashe’ de la tierra, las yerbas del monte para el despojo y unos buenos ojos para calmar la angustia y la melancolía de los que vivimos lejos de la isla.³⁹

The santera’s voyage is one of duty to both her goddaughters past and present but also to her extended Cuban family in Madrid. Her presence, as the narrator reveals, is synonymous with healing, more accurately with maternal healing. The mass is intended as much for the dead as for the living, those in the diaspora who seek to alleviate their nostalgia and their symptoms of dislocation. Perhaps that is why Mayito, the salsa dancer who extended the invite, feverishly insisted that she partake in this mass. It was a blessing, as a Cuban living away from home to have home and its healing powers brought to their new home in Madrid. Her initial reluctance was thus, in this context a mystery.

³⁶ This is the name given to a woman who is considered the highest ranking priestess in santería. The title is given to older women with years of experience practicing the faith and its rituals and her ability to communicate with spirits/saints of the Orisha pantheon.

³⁷ As discussed in Chapter 1, during the late 1990s when the novel is set, Cubans could only leave the island for other countries through marriage, participation in career-related events or by invitations extended by foreigners or Cubans residing abroad (except the United States).

³⁸ *Ahijada* or goddaughter is used in Santería to refer to a female who has been initiated in the religion with the guidance, spiritual and physical, of a santera who is her *madrina* or godmother.

³⁹ Bustamante 17.

How could this Cuban woman, regardless of her self-identification as an exile and of her professional success, let the opportunity to heal in community slip through her hands? Unaware of the project she had undertaken, of the obsessive behavior that had taken over her daily living in search for answers about Adis, he would not take no for an answer. The narrator confesses that her rash acceptance to attend the ceremony came as a surprise to herself, as her *modus operandi* had become to neglect the outside world, fixated on her computer—her only portal to fact gathering. Unbeknownst to her, in reality, it was this spiritual gathering, this human contact in a diasporic community in sync with dead spirits, which would give her much sought facts. Guided by a force other than cognizant self will, she says,

Abandoné todo, incluso a mí misma y me fui para encontrarme con los vivos y los muertos. Ya no controlaba mis pasos. ¡Mis espíritus protectores, mis guías espirituales se encargaban de todo! Ellos sabían lo que hacían.⁴⁰

Releasing her agency to the will of greater powers, a result of cultural and religious conditioning that remains firmly in place despite exilic distance from the homeland, the narrator speaks of the relation between agency, fate and ultimately, control. There is another world that governed by extra human forces is untouched by politics, corruption, self-serving economic gain and physical borders. Belief in this other realm and the bodies that govern it, as the narrator asserts to have, is to allow fate to run its course; control is ceded to those who have left this life. As she gives in to fate, relinquishes her will and follows steps that she is no longer guiding, she is on the path of aperture. This unexplained but accepted experience with her ancestral spirits sheds light on the many forces she has been illogically fighting. She cannot control the lack of information that

⁴⁰ Ibid 17.

has been published on Adis in Cuba, she cannot control the economic situation that impedes her from traveling to Austria in search of concrete answers, nor can she control the politically motivated restrictions that impede her journalistic return to Cuba. It is in the act of letting fate, through familial spirits, work their magic, delineate the path to be taken that she creates her own path to Adis and the truths she seeks. In the lexicon of *santería*, *se le abren los caminos* that lead her to Adis who in death regains the control negated to her in life to guide the writing of this new story through her journalistic interlocutor. What the narrator yearns for is to give that control back to Adis and she can only do so by allowing fate to predetermine the path for so doing. The ceremony was, as fate would have it, a *misa espiritual* for Adis, offered by her *madrina*, *la santera mayor*, via Cuban friends residing in Madrid who had her flown in from Cuba.

At the trans-Atlantic ceremonial gathering, the narrator and the *santera* meet and as media encounters medium, the pieces of Adis's story begin to fall into place. Likewise, the narrator learns of her prime role in the voicing of that story as well as learning about her own spiritual history. She is told that her guiding spirit is a Spanish gypsy, *La gitana*, who had ensured that the journalist's journey from Cuba to Madrid with her young daughter had been a safe one, protecting her every step of the way. The family trope inherent in the Cuba-Spain relationship is reinforced here as a Cuban woman is maternally guided by a Spanish one to her new place of dwelling. The fact that she is a gypsy, a nomadic wanderer, symbolizes the condition of dislocation that also befalls the immigrant subject while simultaneously pointing at the cyclical nature of things. In the same ironic way that the gypsy keeps the journalist from wandering in her exile and has led her to this ceremony to end her aimless pursuit of Adis's story, the journalist will in

turn, through her investigation and publication, help anchor the truth about Adis and settle her restless soul. Manifesting herself through the body of her godmother, Adis communicates her desire to expose the details of an exercise in fighting a fate she could not control. In her ghostly voice from beyond the grave she confesses, “Quiero que mi muerte sea una advertencia. Estoy muy triste. ¡No quería morir! ¡Quería vivir!”⁴¹ Overwhelmed by the guilt of her own reluctance to listen to the warnings from guiding spirits of the eminent danger that awaited her once leaving the island, Adis wants to protect those *jineteras* left behind. She wants her untold story of to serve as a stumbling block to the further exploitation, both self-imposed and state sponsored, of Cuban women. Until this is achieved, Adis’s spirit will not rest in peace. Knowing it is the deceased’s will to make her life and unfortunate death public, the narrator embarks on her investigative journey guided by Adis’s spirit. At the conclusion of the ceremony, she says,

Salí de la casa embelesada entre el humo de tabaco cubano y el alcohol, masticando unas hierbas que me dan ganas de seguir y me transforman en un gladiador que espera subirse al borde del escalón de la larga escalera en la que estamos muchos cubanos para volver a la Habana.⁴²

Entering the ceremony a misguided journalist, the narrator leaves having been initiated into a gladiatorial combat—Cuba may be able to control the media but not its medium—that will lead her to the world of Cuba’s *jineteras*.

⁴¹ Ibid 33.

⁴² Ibid 35.

**Reporting From Madrid:
On Testimony and The Collected Memories of Cuban Jineteras**

*Temo, vamos a ver
que tengo el susto de andar por mi país
sueño con todo lo que huyó de él
temo, vamos a ver
que por ser cubana
alguien me puede detener
dejarme en Villa Marista cuatro días sin
comer
la salida está en la cama de un hotel.*⁴³

The novel's narrator commences her investigation as a result of her encounter with the Cuban community at the *misa espiritual*. It is there that the *santera mayor* puts her into contact not only with Adis's spirit but also with Zulema—Adis's friend and fellow *jinetera* currently residing in Madrid. Zulema serves as the portal to other Cuban *jineteras* who have relocated to Madrid and whose testimony of life as a prostitute in Special Period Cuba will take the journalist back in time to a world she never knew, "Para los que habíamos estado en el piso de las Ventas, ya la Habana era una ciudad irreconocible," but in the diaspora claims as her own in an attempt to vindicate the victims of Castro's system.⁴⁴ The narrator discovers that this project entails a personal journey to reconcile with the Cuba she left behind. It is precisely a world as foreign to her own as a white, professional, exiled woman that it is her only link to a metaphoric return to the island laden with a symbolic contestation of what she considers a stifling and abusive system. The literary gesture of *Jineteras*'s journalist narrator speaks to an

⁴³ This is an adaptation by the *jineteras* in the novel of Nicolás Guillén's 1964 poem *Tengo*. The verse that is restructured reads: *Tengo, vamos a ver/ que siendo un negro/nadie me puede detener en la puerta de un hotel*.

⁴⁴ Ibid 40.

emergence of testimonial-like narratives involving a form of fictional narrative that works to denounce the repression during regimes in Latin America. The genre has been a popular one amongst several authors who, like the journalist narrator of the novel, write from exile such as Isabel Allende whose novel *The House of Spirits* (1982) speaks of Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile and Mario Vargas Llosa's *The Feast of the Goat* (2000) about Rafael Trujillo's dictatorship in the Dominican Republic.⁴⁵ Lisette Bustamante as a Cuban writer exiled in Madrid inserts herself in this line of Latin American authors with the novel *Jineteras* while simultaneously—through the character of the journalist narrator—inserting herself into a Cuban literary tradition of testimonial narrative dating back to 1966 in Miguel Barnet's *Biografía de un Cimarrón*.⁴⁶ By piecing together the accounts of Adis and the other women in *Jineteras* (in a fictive manner), the journalist narrator speaks for what she perceives to be the victims of Castro's system, the *jineteras* who have no voice, in a fashion similar to that of the Elizabeth Burgos/Rigoberta Menchú dynamic that plays out in the controversial 1984 autobiography *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*. Anthropologist Elisabeth Burgos's compilation of interviews with the Guatemalan organizer of resistance to oppression and

⁴⁵ Coral A. Walker “ Evolution of Genres in Latin American Literature: The Birth of the Testimonio (Testimonial Narrative)”, in *Serendip*. (April 15, 2011)
<http://serendip.brynmawr.edu/exchange/node/10029>

⁴⁶ Miguel Barnet, *Biografía de un Cimarrón* (Biography of a Runaway Slave), tells the story of Esteban Montejo, a Cuban man of African descent and his hardships as a slave, a fugitive slave and a soldier during the Cuban War for Independence. In *Jineteras*, Lisette Bustamante's narrator speaks of an enslaved Adis Pérez (and other *jineteras*) whose slavery was that of the sex tourism industry and she was fighting a metaphoric war for independence from Special Period Cuba. She and the other women whose stories are told formed part of a marginalized group born of the political and economic climate created by the Cuban government which the novel's narrator aims to denounce the state and its backing of female prostitution .

the struggle for Indian peasant peoples' rights in her native country makes her more than an editor an acknowledged ghostwriter.⁴⁷ The journalist narrator in Bustamante's novel is also a ghostwriter in two senses of the word. First, she literally works with Adis's ghost as the novel tells in detail as part of Cuban spiritual beliefs in communication with the dead through the *santera mayor* and other common practices. Secondly, the narrator of the novel is a ghostwriter in the literal sense of writing the text for Adis, for the *jineteras* who are subaltern subjects in the likes Menchú who have no physical voice to verbalize their stories of victimization. Laden with the objective of creating awareness and global consciousness of the politically and economically motivated abuses against them, Burgos and Bustamante (as the author of *Jineteras* and through the character of the journalist narrator who writes a novel about *jineteras*) are interlocutors who verbalize, in the written word, the meaning of a testimonial narrative. This is reaffirmed by Menchú's statement "My story is the story of all poor Guatemalans" and Adis's ghostly words "Quiero que mi muerte sea una advertencia."⁴⁸

The journalist begins to piece together the fragments of Adis's life through her interviews with Zulema, stepping into the lives of the *jineteras* through Zulema's memories of their life stories characterized by need and desperation. Zulema thus becomes the voice of what James E. Young calls collected memory in his book *The*

⁴⁷ Elisabeth Burgos and Rigoberta Menchú. *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú, y así me nació la conciencia*. (Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno Editores) 1998. Burgos appears as the editor of Rigoberta Menchu's Spanish-language autobiography. However, since Menchú claims in the book that she couldn't read or write in Spanish the extent to which her testimony is edited by Burgos is questioned. Thus, the validity of the testimony as truth has been one taken up by scholars like David Stoll, John Beverly and has incited much work in the field of testimonio criticism like that of Alberto Moreiras.

⁴⁸ Burgos 1 and Bustamante 33

Texture of Memory: The Holocaust Memorials and Meaning. Young thinks about memorial spaces through the lens of collected memory, defined as the many discrete memories that are gathered and assigned common meaning.⁴⁹ This notion of collected memory—as opposed to Maurice Halbwach’s collective memory—marks memory’s inherently fragmented, collected and individual character. The memories Zulema recounts throughout the novel of both her own life and that of other *jineteras* are, as the fashion in which they are presented to the reader, fragmented and collected over a period of time by the journalist narrator. Adis’s written story—the novel itself as text—thus becomes the memorial space where the collected memory spoken by Zulema is assigned common meaning. Materialized in the fictive text, the collected memories gathered by the journalist become collective as they reflect common experiences of Cuban women turned *jineteras* during the Special Period. Gathered by means of formal interviews as well as everyday conversations, Zulema’s memories are as indicative of what John Assman calls ‘communicative memory’—based on everyday communication—as it is of testimony.⁵⁰ Zulema’s recollections in the fictive text reflect the elements of testimonial literature outlined by George Yúdice in his 1985 article “*Testimonio* and Postmodernism” in the following way:

Testimonial literature is an authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of a situation (e.g., war, oppression, revolution, etc.). Emphasizing popular oral discourse, the witness portrays his or her own experience as a representative of a collective memory and identity. Truth is summoned in the cause of denouncing a present situation of exploitation and oppression or exorcising and setting aright official history.⁵¹

⁴⁹ James E. Young. *The Texture of Memory: The Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) 11.

⁵⁰ Jan Assmann. *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies*. Stanford: Stanford University Press 2005) 1.

⁵¹ George Yúdice. “*Testimonio* and Postmodernism”. *Latin American Perspectives*, 18(3) (1985), 15-31.

Zulema as a witness of Adis' life in Cuba as a *jinetera* is urged by her unfortunate death to speak, through collected memory, about collective memories of the struggle and desire for escape from Special Period Cuba to denounce the Cuban government's unspoken involvement in the exploitative history of *jineterismo*. Through her interviews with Zulema she finds that this underground world of *jineteras* is a performative one that although seemingly in accord with a state imposition is tinged with subversive antics. What is narrated is the existence of a *jinetera* folkloric subculture that in appropriating and exceeding state promotion, challenges the method of exploitation.⁵² In his blog "Habaneceres" (part of the digital version of *Cubaencuentro*), Cuban journalist and author Luis Manuel García Méndez (residing in Madrid) uses the phrase "personajes del folklore patrio" to describe Cuba's *jineteras*. Although in the context of shedding light on the contemporary use of the word in Cuban society to contrast its first use in 1987, his statement serves as a point of departure for understanding *jineteras* as folkloric performers at which the novel hints.⁵³ *Jineteras* willingly, although forcefully due to a looming economic situation, play into the needs of the state, as Charles Trumbull observes in his article "Prostitution and Tourism in Cuba."⁵⁴ Their immediate need to benefit from monetary remuneration is imperative for daily survival in what is described

⁵² It is worth noting that although this dismantles the image of these women as victims, the journalist narrator nonetheless writes about the *jineteras* from the less than objective angle of the victim.

⁵³ Luis Manuel García Méndez. "Habaneceres" blog in <http://www.cubaencuentro.com/luis-manuel-garcia/blogs/habaneceres/habanerias/el-caso-del-caso-sandra> (2007). The word *jinetera* appears for the first time in relation to prostitution activities in a 1987 article found in the Cuban magazine *Somos Rebeldes* entitled "El caso Sandra". However, García Méndez clarifies that its use then differs from its present day meanings and associations in light of Special Period induced prostitution practices.

⁵⁴ Charles Trumbull "Prostitution and Sex Tourism in Cuba." In: *Cuba in Transition* 11 (2001), 356-371.

as a savage world where they are the tourists' providers of the "carne fresca de Castro."⁵⁵ Nonetheless, if they play stellar roles in Havana's Malecón and the private spaces that these carnal exchanges lead them to, they can find an escape route off the island in an enamored tourist. Serving their own needs, abandoning the street life dabbled with risk, disease, exploitation and fear, these *jineteras* leave the system hanging in order to pursue their freedom as limited as it may be in settling for whoever will facilitate said escape. As they contribute, one by one—Zulema, Patricia, Martha, Tatiana, Adis—to less Cuban women working the streets of el Malecón through immigration, they leave the system four 'employees' short. This alternative idea of what a *jinetera* is supposed to do to uphold the Revolution's cause in a market economy, in challenging the supposition subverts existing power structures, fitting with the ideas of folkloric cultures outlined in *Memory and Modernity: Popular Culture in Latin America* by authors William Rowe and Vivian Schelling.⁵⁶ Cultural actions come to be called folklore when understood as a historical process of producers as well as those who interpret and control those actions. The power structures behind culture of which Antonio Gramsci spoke are evident here. In their everyday hustle for themselves Cuban *jineteras* navigate, appropriate and reverse the perception of producers and controllers of that folkloric subculture. This resulting folkloric subculture they create and which is perpetuated is—as Brazilian anthropologist José Jorge de Carvalho has observed—where collective memory is conserved, and precisely where the journalist narrator of *Jineteras* directs her investigation in the

⁵⁵ Ibid 79.

⁵⁶ William Rowe and Vivian Schelling. *Memory and Modernity: Popular Culture in Latin America*. (New York: Verso 1991) 4-5.

testimony of Zulema.⁵⁷ Unfortunately, as their stories reveal for every four that leave Cuba, there are four equally desperate in a 1990s Cuban economy willing to replace them. Their bodies thus become a metaphor for Cuba untouched during the years of Castro's Revolution until the needs of the Special Period entered the island's history creating the visible and popular world of *jineteras*.⁵⁸ They clearly point at Latin American, Canadian and other European males' involvement in the industry while emphasizing an overwhelming presence of Spanish clientele. This speaks to the historical context of Spain's involvement in the Special Period, and their protagonistic role in the sex tourism industry which accounts for their current lives as former Cuban *jineteras* living in Madrid. The narrator also learns that these women's experiences in Spain's capital city are conditioned by their experiences in Cuba's capital city, creating parallel worlds. Crossing the Atlantic frees them of a continued cycle of exploitation but it does not, as in the case of *La Musicóloga* in Alexis Díaz-Pimienta's *Maldita danza*, free them of the stereotypes synonymous with *cubana*. Young, mulata, and formerly *jineteras*, they are inevitably, in Madrid, condemned to that damned cyclical dance against *los tópicos*.

⁵⁷ As quoted in Rowe and Schelling 5.

⁵⁸ Prostitution existed in Cuba prior to the Special Period. Often Batista's government has been blamed for the demoralization of Cuba for allowing gambling, prostitution and corruption to plague the island. He has been blamed for allowing Cuba to become the United States' whorehouse. However, the Special Period when dollarization was instituted led women to openly and publicly seek dollars as prostitutes. *Jineterismo* thus develops during the Special Period as a culturally accepted and publicly recognized mode of survival. Men also partake in *jineterismo* (now referred to as *pingüerismo*) but to a lesser public degree than women. By Cuban law, prostitution is said to be unaccepted during the Special Period and practices were set in place to punish those caught in its logistics. In the face of its obvious presence in more than a decade that the Special Period lasted, it became increasingly more accepted and less if at punishable by law.

Zulema— The Atypical Jinetera Success Story

Zulema gives the narrator a palpable first-hand account of both the jinetera experience in Cuba and a glimpse at Adis's life while working as one. She agrees to corroborate information with both a feminist sense of duty and a personal sense of duty to Adis, whom she regrets not having been able to aid more fully through her tribulations in Austria. She clarifies, as the first words on the record in the novel, that she seeks to clear the name of Cubans, female and male alike, who have been pigeonholed into the 'whore'/ male 'whore' stereotype. In a defiant tone which she demanded be recorded by a tape recorder for posterity—in the likes of Rigoberta Menchú—she says,

Ser cubana no es sinónimo de puta y esto no es sólo un asunto de mujeres. Tampoco todos los hombres son jineteros.... ya estoy bastante cansada que nos confundan. Algunas han hecho cosas que yo me avergüenzo. ¡Pero sabes lo que pasa chica, que nos meten a todas en el mismo saco cada dos por tres! No sé si tú lo has vivido, quizás no, porque eres blanca, pero imagínate conmigo lo que pasa.⁵⁹

The motivation to rescue the Cuban subject's image in the diaspora is interestingly placed in the voice of this character who, as the novel shows is an atypical jinetera. While her work routine was no different than the other *jineteras* whose stories are narrated and her motives for wanting to leave Cuba were purely economic as she reiterates to the journalist, her escape from Cuba was not. She did not leave under false pretenses, taking an exit visa from whoever was willing to grant it to her regardless of the price to be paid upon arrival abroad. She confesses that her life in Madrid is a happy one—she is “encantada de la vida” there because she was able to arrive through a legitimate love-

⁵⁹ Bustamante 37

based marriage with her Spanish husband, Pedro.⁶⁰ Her successful love story is reflective of the type of open-prostitution common in Thailand of which Ingrid Kummels makes mention in her 2005 article “Love in the Time of Diaspora: Global Markets and Local Meanings in Prostitution, Marriage and Womanhood in Cuba.” It is the type of relationship that blossoms into romance and marriage having begun as a neutral sexually based service that over time did not distinguish between economy and emotion.⁶¹ And as Zulema is an atypical Cuban woman, she is also concerned about the stereotyping to which Cuban men are subjected.⁶²

Despite an atypical fairytale ending escape from Cuba, Zulema must deal with the realities to which she is subjected in her host city. In a scene reminiscent of the one narrated by *La Musicóloga* in *Maldita danza*, while at a local bar in Madrid with her husband’s colleagues, Zulema falls victim to a discussion about Cuba and the tópicos it raises from the Spanish perspective. According to her account, the conversation that took place in this typical Spanish locale between the Spaniards with a pending trip to Cuba was centered around “lo típico de la isla,” inevitably coming full circle to the topic of *las*

⁶⁰ Ibid 38.

⁶¹ Ingrid Kimmels. “Love in the Time of Diaspora. Global Markets and Local Meanings in Prostitution, Marriage and Womanhood in Cuba”. *Iberoamericana*. V 20 (2005), 7-26. <http://www.iai.spk-berlin.de/fileadmin/dokumentenbibliothek/Iberoamericana//20-kummels.pdf>

⁶² There have been a number of young mulato Cuban men who have gained fame for their relationships with older Spanish women who have “rescued” them from Special Period Cuba. Dinio who later become a singer, Lázaro who starred in Spain’s version of Big Brother (Gran Hermano) and Yaemil López, husband the of famed and controversial vedette Aramis Fuster. They have all been featured on Spanish television talk shows, *platós*, including ¿ Dónde estás corazón? which can be viewed on YouTube. In *Jineteras*, the theme of male prostitutes is not explored except a brief mention of Boris, the homosexual *jinetero* who worked alongside the *jineteras* interviewed in the novel and an unnamed *jinetero* who was purposefully infected with Aids by a Canadian tourist/client.

jineteras.⁶³ One man argued that if what the traveler wanted was a Cuban woman, there were plenty to be found in Madrid who were alone and in need of a Spanish man. The opinionated traveler confesses to having bought several cheap goods at the local Sunday flea market, *El Rastro*, with the intent of wooing a different Cuban woman every night that he vacationed on the island. He is turned off by the suggestion of finding a local Cuban woman because he believes they have been tarnished by their exposure to democracy which in turn has caused them to lose their prized innocence and their Cuban sass. He says, “Las que viven aquí conocen de qué va este rollo... ya parecen españolas.”⁶⁴ This Spaniard’s observation is evidence of the conditioning of prostitution by constructs of ethnicity and nationality that has been documented by Kemala Kempadoo’s research on Caribbean women sex workers. In her 2004 book *Sexing the Caribbean: Gender, Race and Sexual Labor* she echoes arguments by other scholars such as O’Connell Davidson about how neocolonial racist attitudes that construct the ‘Other’ as sexually exotic, continue to shape demand and fuel current globalized sex commerce.⁶⁵ Angered by his evident lack of respect for her and other Cuban women, she defends her position—Cuban women of the Madrid diaspora are as Cuban as those on the island with the difference being that necessity is not a factor for those in Spain. Unlike their island counterparts, they don’t need to “meterse en camisa de once varas para vivir y las que lo hacen es porque quieren, pero nadie las obliga.”⁶⁶ As she champions the Cuban woman’s

⁶³ Bustamante 83.

⁶⁴ Ibid 83.

⁶⁵ Kemala Kampadoo. *Sexing the Caribbean: Gender, Race and Sexual Labor*. London: Routledge 2004, Introduction.

⁶⁶ Bustamante 83.

cause, she demands respect for *jineteras* who, with dignity at the forefront, undertake their work out of need, as well as for those who are not in the business. The Spaniard dismisses her outlook, insinuating that she is no position to speak. He says, “Anda, no seas la salvadora de la causa cubana, ni te pongas a fomentar el corporativismo femenino cubano que tú estás aquí muy tranquila con tu marido y allí se tienen que buscar la vida.”⁶⁷ As his patriarchal point of view eradicated the possibility of Zulema having a valid voice in the matter, he negates her right to protest such misogynist behavior simply because she is no longer one of *them*. He insinuates that these are not palpable concerns of hers given her salvaged existence in Madrid. Her reluctance to keep her comments to herself demonstrate her feminist spirit which is equally present in the narrator, Adis, and the other *jineteras* who partake in the project. It is the same spirit that characterized *La Musicóloga*. These female characters demonstrate how physical escape from Cuba and its maladies—tópicos included—does not equal erasure of those ills. Their struggles there are carried over into the diaspora where, as feminists, they fight against the perpetuation of those harmful stereotypes back home and in their new homes. Because Zulema is an atypical case, her husband supports her feminist point of view and defends both her honor and that of other Cuban women. Throwing diatribes at his offensive colleague, he reminds him that going to Cuba to pursue needy women which he would not fathom doing in Spain is a less than manly act. In so doing, Pedro “le ha tocado su sentimiento de colonizador de primer mundo.”⁶⁸ Refusing to let him insult Zulema and Cuban women by extension, he is, as his name indicates, her rock. The encounter ends with the former

⁶⁷ Ibid 84.

⁶⁸ Ibid 85.

jinetera contemplating both the fate of her Cuban sisters on the island and her own fortune. “Zulema pensó en cuántos ha conocido que antes de irse a Cuba se jactaron en una barra de las grandes conquistas que harían en la Perla del Edén. Miró al cielo y le dio gracias a Yemayá por protegerla de tanto desperdicio y por ponerle en el camino a un hombre como su queridísimo Pedro.”⁶⁹

Pedro and Zulema’s Hispano-Cuban love story began in one of Havana’s bars in the early 1990s. Having ended a recent relationship, Pedro decided to travel to a tropical destination to clear his head and a friend had suggested Cuba or the Dominican Republic. Initially told that both destinations were booked for New Year’s Eve—evidence of the popularity of both islands with Spaniards—he was able to snatch a seat on the flight a week before his departure day. The novel describes the embarrassment Pedro felt upon hearing his fellow countrymen speak about their sexual conquests on the island and the multiple sweet numbers that were waiting for them upon their arrival. Atypical, Pedro had sworn he would not use this time in Cuba to engage in the routine sexual ventures those other men he arrived had bragged about. He entered a bar where there were numerous women—of all hues and semblance—out for the hunt with plenty of foreign men who were there with the same objective. Zulema entered the bar with a friend and unlike the other women she was engaged in a conversation with a friend, a sign for Pedro that this was no typical Cuban woman; this *negra* was not “buscando un extranjero para esa noche.”⁷⁰ Having asked for forgiveness at *El Rincón de San Lázaro* the day before for engaging in the jinetera life and confident in the destiny her pantheon had set for her,

⁶⁹ Ibid 86.

⁷⁰ Ibid 88.

Zulema took well to Pedro approaching her. Hitting it off, the two spent days together getting to know one another and eventually partook in sexual relations. Although Pedro, a photographer by profession, returned to Madrid at the end of his vacation, within a year he had arranged for their marriage and her permanent relocation to Madrid. He fought for their love although knowing her history as a *jinetera* everyone around him planted the seed of doubt in his mind about her being a typical Cuban woman seeking a ticket off the island. It is perhaps because he is a photographer, because he had a trained eye to seek the many angles that capture one picture the he is able to find the humanity and love in Zulema where others could not or would not.

Pedro knew Zulema's life story and was determined not to judge her for her days as a *jinetera* at El Malecón. Zulema openly shared her life story with the journalist narrator despite admitting that due to sheer shame, not embarrassment "porque ahí están mis padres que no les falta lo indispensable para vivir, tampoco las medicinas que le manda el médico por sus problemas de salud," it is not a topic she revels in discussing.⁷¹ She addresses her past in an attempt to clarify the motivating factors behind a life of *jineterismo*. The now thirty year old woman confesses she is the youngest of seven children born to parents with an unwavering loyalty to Castro's Revolution. With this family history, it seemed her future would be a bright one:

Sus abuelos lucharon en la guerra de independencia de 1898. Su madre trabajó en el Comité Central del Partido y por enfermedad tuvo que retirarse. Quién le hubiera dicho a aquella familia que su hija terminaría siendo una *jinetera*. Sus padres pensaban en la carrera universitaria que Zulema estudiaría o sino en los beneficios que podía obtener por su integración al régimen, era una de las privilegiadas que podía optar por una beca en Alemania. Todas esas ilusiones se

⁷¹ Ibid 115.

desvanecieron cuando el mundo socialista se vino abajo. En esa familia, Zulema fue la excepción.⁷²

As the exception who knew she was “una negra linda y lo supo aprovechar en su momento” she began her life of prostitution at the age of sixteen and as the conditions under the Special Period worsened she contemplated getting on a raft to her freedom 90 miles away in Miami.⁷³ It was Adis who dissuaded her from risking her life in the high seas reminding her that she needed her good friend by her side. Zulema was a typical jinetera until six years into the business and after ample talks with Adis she decided to stop working the streets and figure out other viable options. It was then, with an *atypical* mentality that her luck changed. As fate and the Orishas, namely *La Caridad del Cobre*, would have it—a recurring theme in the novel—Pedro entered the picture.

At the time that the interview is being conducted in the novel, Zulema has successfully acquired a new life for herself alongside Pedro. She works caring for children while studying a career in Communications and she is able to aid her family economically from her immigrant position in Spain. The transition from Cuban to Spanish society has been a difficult one eased only by her husband. She says,

Madrid es una ciudad enorme y me pierdo, me siento desamparada, rodeada de tiendas y bares en los que se acumula todo.... lo que sí he sentido es el racismo, sobre todo en las tiendas.... Claro que cuando salgo con Pedro es distinto, con él me siento protegida y sé que nadie se meterá conmigo. Por ahora tengo que aprender a andar solita poco a poco, porque esto es como volver a nacer.⁷⁴

⁷² Ibid 116-7.

⁷³ Ibid 117.

⁷⁴ Ibid 119.

This rebirth that Zulema experiences is atypically associated with the lives of Cuban *jineteras* once they have settled into new lives abroad. Despite the daily encounters with stereotypes and treatment that is based on her negritude, she nonetheless has the opportunity to achieve goals in her new host society that although existent in Cuba would have been fruitless. The theme of new life is also reinforced by her motherhood. As Pedro points out, Zulema now has “raíces en esta tierra” in her daughter, la *mulatica* who he hopes to one day take back to a free Cuba. As the virgin/whore/mother triangle is completed in Zulema, it is the maternal state that now keeps her firmly rooted in the diaspora. She has a place within that large city and its many spaces and will gradually adapt to it and accept it as her own because she has the right to rebuild her life abroad. She will do so, without forgetting the past that marks her, that has conditioned her, that has led her to Madrid while leaving the rest of Cuba’s women behind. It is precisely in her sense of self as woman that Zulema, like other Cuban women her husband observes,

ejerce su feminidad como el arma más poderosa que tiene para reivindicar sus derechos. En ningún momento asume roles masculinos para defenderse, aunque tiene un carácter fuerte y una voluntad de hierro. Pero sus armas son auténticamente femeninas.⁷⁵

Her feminine strife carries on in her everyday steps, physical and metaphorical through the city of Madrid.

⁷⁵ Ibid 92.

Patricia, Martha, Tatiana and Other Jineteras del Montón

...jinetera, una especie de dios dialéctico del régimen castrista que deambula por las calles de la capital. <<Yo no soy la revolución, ni el socialismo, ni la patria>>.⁷⁶

Patricia: The Human Side of Jineterismo

Stemming from her interviews with Zulema, the narrator is introduced to the lives of several other *jineteras*, the facts of which she includes in the novel as part of the project of memory collection. She learns that in that world of prostitution, men and women alike, “Han vivido encerrados en su barrio, en su provincia, imaginando lo que hay después de ese muro de agua.”⁷⁷ With each of the women whose lives are brought to life in these pages, the narrator pieces together the thoughts, the fears, the expectations, the joy, the defeat associated with this lifestyle. Each subject’s experience, regardless of age, racial makeup or sex, shows a stifling reality turned into a need:

...siempre han vivido rodeados por la escasez, la prohibiciones y la enfermiza ansiedad por conocer a un extranjero. Y hoy están allí, en el Malecón, dispuestos a salir al carro de un turista que ofrezca un escenario para sus sueños.⁷⁸

It is confirmed that *jineterismo* is a performance in survival of the fittest; a Darwinian strategy in the art of outliving a repressive daily existence in a country downtrodden by economic hardship. As they rest their hopes for escape on those nights of remunerated

⁷⁶ Ibid 67.

⁷⁷ Ibid 59.

⁷⁸ Ibid 59.

passion they are reminded that they are secondary characters in a greater political stage over which they have no control. In Patricia's words, "Las *jineteras* y los *jineteros* somos los que llevamos la política turística de este país. Si cuando yo digo que el chulo más rico y más grande es Fidel Castro..."⁷⁹ Her words resonate with observations made by Victoria L. McCard in the essay "Compañera or Ciudadana? The Double Life of the Jinetera in Daina Chaviano's *El hombre, la hembra y el hambre*":

By cooperating in the use of the sensual *mulata* image to promote tourism, the government has reinforced—perhaps unintentionally—an old double standard whereby men are encouraged to pursue women for sex, while the women who service them are often condemned by those that create the demand and the society that benefits from its existence.⁸⁰

Patricia who along with her colleagues falls victim to the perpetuated stereotype asserts, "Cubana y mierda es lo mismo".⁸¹

Patricia Fernández's tone is less than forgiving as the above quotes demonstrates and it speaks to her frustration with the way things have played out in her life. It is perhaps her story which makes most clear the extent to which the dire situation in Cuba has been the only frame of reference for the generation to which she belongs. For the teens like herself the experience has been one of disavowal. They do not exist in the national imaginary but to help fuel the lucrative sex tourism of the 1990s. They cannot, as Cuban citizens who work for their dollars enjoy the fruits of their labor at *El Comodoro*,

⁷⁹ Ibid 58.

⁸⁰ Victoria L. McCard. "Compañera or Ciudadana? The Double Life of the Jinetera in Daina Chaviano's *El hombre, la hembra y el hambre*." *Hispanet Journal*. 1 (2008)
<http://www.hispanetjournal.com/Companeraociudadana.pdf>

⁸¹ Bustamante 59.

El Palacio de la Salsa or *Copacabana*.⁸² Patricia's disillusionment is such that she curses having been born in Cuba. Her childhood memories are plagued by self-loathing for knowing herself to be a product of that island and by an overwhelming sentiment of rejection for Cuba and its men and the ever present desire to "ser de afuera."⁸³ By performing her nightly ritual of hired copulation she hopes to score the role of her life, exiting that stage that is Cuba. Unlike Zulema, Patricia is a typical *jinetera* whose motto (su lema) is, "Lo importante es salir de aquí, después ya veré cómo me las arreglo."⁸⁴

Although the ending of Patricia's life story is left a mystery in the novel, what is clearly delineated is that she inserts the human into human contact when thinking about the sexual exchange. She poses the question, "¿Cuántos no cruzan el Atlántico para tener la ternura que olvidan en su rutina y que aquí les ofrecemos por una cena, una noche en la discoteca o, simplemente, por salir de este sistema obsoleto?"⁸⁵ By contemplating the possibility of a human need for company on the part of the client she offers a different perspective to what is perceived by the narrator and the other *jineteras* interviewed as an exploitative system of pleasure for hire that feeds off a one-sided need. Although Patricia can ponder the ulterior motives for partaking in sex tourism, she nonetheless admits that along with the goods they pack into their suitcase, clients bring a lack of sensitivity to the *jinetera's* predicament and much first world arrogance in order to enjoy the sex that

⁸² As of 1993 Cuba undergoes dollarization where the U.S. dollar circulates as acceptable currency. It is the only currency accepted at the time for entry to certain nightclubs as those here listed and hotels throughout the island. Only foreigners with U.S. dollars or other foreign currency were allowed entry to these establishments.

⁸³ Bustamante 57.

⁸⁴ Ibid 60.

⁸⁵ Ibid 58.

Cuban women easily offer them. She even shares her devised stereotypical classificatory system of supply and demand in this world of jineterismo. Blondes have more fun and are the apple of Mexican men's eyes. For French, German, Italian, Swiss, Swedish and British clients, the darker and "más monas" the better.⁸⁶ Although 'mona' can be understood in the Caribbean sense of "cute," her tone seems to hint at a European gaze that animalizes Cuban women and this exotic/animalistic difference is what makes them attractive. This comment about Cuban women's semblance to that of *monas* (female monkeys) reverts to the civilization (outside world) versus barbarism (Cuba) dichotomy. Lastly, Spaniards prefer their creation: the mulata, the perfect fusion of African and European ancestry. Zulema's laundry list of preference speaks to observations made by Judith O'Connell Davidson in her essay "Sex Tourism in Cuba" in regards to European sex tourists who imagine Cuban women's racialized sexualities (that of mulatas and negras) "to be 'untamed' and primitive and therefore more uninhibited, exciting and abandoned than white sexuality."⁸⁷ Regardless of the country of origin or their taste for Cuba's multi-hued women, the prized *perlas del Edén*, she assures the narrator that "El visitante se siente un rey, un salvador, un hombre solidario y humano."⁸⁸ Both the co-dependence, albeit minor, that she proposes serves as a microcosm of the co-dependency model between Spain and Cuba and the Messianic lexicon in describing foreign clients (mostly Spaniard) reflect points I have argued for in the preceding chapters of this dissertation.

⁸⁶ Ibid 60.

⁸⁷ Judith O'Connell Davidson "Sex Tourism in Cuba." In: *Race & Class* 38, 1, (1996) 39-48.

⁸⁸ Bustamante 60.

Martha: The Unusual Case of the Pimp

A jinetera befriended by both Zulema and Adis, Martha began to work the streets in eleventh grade. Of the little that is gathered from her directly, she reveals: “Empecé a acostarme con cualquiera que me gustara. Fue entonces cuando apareció Julián y me enamoré.”⁸⁹ Unlike her other colleagues, who expressed disregard or utter reluctance in engaging in a romantic relationship with a Cuban man, Martha falls in love with a compatriot. In an unusual twist in the business, Julián proposes to be Martha’s pimp, setting her up with her clients highlighting the benefits (undisclosed to the narrator) they would reap from an organized service to foreigners. As the reader learns from Zulema, this proposal was at odds with the free agent mentality that characterizes the world of *jineteras* where, “generalmente cada una va a lo suyo y a sacar lo que se pueda.”⁹⁰ This autonomy and individualism of *jineterismo* has been documented by Judith O’Connell Davidson who highlights the ways in which this form of prostitution differs from other local forms of prostitution. In her 1996 essay “Sex Tourism in Cuba,” O’Connell Davidson observes, “At present, the sale of sexual services does not take place within an established and organisational framework [...] there is no network of brothels, no organised system of bar prostitution.”⁹¹ A distinction can thus be made between prostitution before and after the Revolution where the former was perceived to be on a

⁸⁹ Ibid 100.

⁹⁰ Ibid 100.

⁹¹ O’Connell Davidson 46.

grand, mafia-run scale versus the latter which insists on individual enterprise. Caught selling clothing articles on the black market, Julián is incarcerated and Martha dedicates the rest of her youth to jineterismo in order to bring her beloved food and cigars behind bars. With said pressure, no family abroad to aid her through remittances and what seemed to be slow times in the *Triángulo de las Bermudas*,⁹² Martha resorts to telling tourists about her pimp's plight in order to get pity business. Her honesty results in what seems like an episode of magical realism akin to that in Gabriel García Márquez's *La increíble y triste historia de la cándida Eréndira y su abuela desalmada*. Martha, out of desperation, says that she "como si estuviera hacienda butifarras," slept with eleven Filipino sailors in one night. Of all the *jineteras* and their friends, Zulema recalls Adis was the only one who did not pass judgment on her, did not deem her crazy, as Adis understood that it was simply a reflection of Martha's extreme necessity and unconditional love for Julián. Martha's story sets her apart from Zulema, Patricia and Adis because her priority was survival within the confines of the island, not actively seeking a golden ticket into a promised paradise beyond the Malecón's horizon.

Tatiana

Confident and cynical, sixteen-year-old Tatiana is the feistiest *jinetera* whose story lines the pages of this novel. At her young age, she is the only subject who must sell her body, in part, to sustain a drug addiction that extends from marihuana to cocaine. As pressing as such a costly habit may seem, Tatiana is a poised adolescent whose demeanor

⁹² Triangulo de las Bermudas refers to the triangular positioning of three major zones for prostitution in Havana that includes the Hotel Cohiba, the Riviera hotel and el Cupet (gas station) between Paseo and Malecón.

in reeling in a foreigner demonstrates the art of meshing business acumen with sexy sarcasm thus exhibiting qualities of the entrepreneur within an informal economy based on sexual services as noted by Louise White in speaking about prostitution in Africa.⁹³ Of all the *jineteras*, she is the one who exhibits most control over her clients and the direction that her rendezvous will take. The reader sees her in action the day that Joan, a businessman from Barcelona who is inaugurating a hotel on the northern end of the island, solicits her services. Under the ruse of being lost, he asks Tatiana for directions, and she is in turn curt and snappy with him, bordering on being offensive. Joan pays attention to everything about her, except the rude words coming out of her mouth because he is mesmerized by the other business transaction he is about to score.

Además de sus gestiones de negocios, aprovecha su tiempo para estrechar relaciones con las cubanas. Mira a Tatiana con malicia. Examina su ropa y lo que hay debajo de ella, parece un tarantante de caballos y yegua que en una feria busca el mejor animal.

-- *¿Qué miras tanto? Si no te convengo, ya sabes.*⁹⁴

Subject to his demeaning gaze, Tatiana responds in a fashion that shows complete disregard for an unspoken *jinetera* etiquette that dictates that a potential client should always be treated like royalty. The lack of desperation in her response coupled with the security that if not him another tourist will come along is indicative of a seasoned *jinetera* who knows how to play the game. Simultaneously, it speaks to a recognition and defense of self-worth where she is bothered by the objectification of her body knowing full well that this grandfather of four is in no predicament to be selective. Reiterating his growing

⁹³Louise White *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press: 1990).

⁹⁴Bustamante 130.

physical attraction to her, Joan concedes to her every whim even though it significantly delays the act. She plays the role of domineering seductress so well that she is able to consistently undermine his insistence to get right down to business. The conversation that seals the agreement and the one to follow highlights this point:

-- Bueno, mi corazón espera un poquito. Primero déjame chocar con la concreta que hace varios días que no como bien...

--Bueeeeenooooooooo, pues entonces, vamos a la Bodeguita para que ese cuerpo se mantenga hermoso y macizo.

El almuerzo transcurrió entre caricias, tostones, mojitos, cerdo asado, besos, moros y cristianos. Las manos de Joan vagaban por el cuerpo de Tatiana y su boca se desplazaba desde sus brazos hasta la nuca. Lentamente iba tomando posesión de toda su geografía.

--Oye, ¡que pegajoso eres! No me dejas casi ni comer. Cálmate un poquito que hay tiempo.⁹⁵

Tatiana's body, referred to as her 'geography' becomes a metaphor for the island and the present progressive verb employed to describe Joan's action—'taking possession' of that geography—is indicative of the historical underpinnings of the Special Period in relation to Spain's return to re-conquer and/or exploit the island. Freely expressing her limits and adamantly voicing her discomfort with the degree to which he takes liberties with her body, Tatiana represents the voice of Cuba, its *jineteras* and *jineteros* at their wit's end with the degrading sense of entitlement and the possessive attitude that foreigners exhibit towards Cuba/their bodies. For those in the business, their bodies are all that they have left to control.

⁹⁵ Ibid 132.

Nonetheless playful and adventurous, Tatiana daringly suggests that instead of a routine hotel encounter they have an Edenic one in an enchanted forest à la Adam and Eve. Exhibiting complete control of the situation, she challenges Joan to make her fantasy come true. In essence, she is diverting the importance of the experience from him and his needs to her own, dismantling the perceived power relation in the exchange. In this subversive act of self-satisfaction, Tatiana communicates that while he may be paying for a service, the shots are hers to call. While she is in the role of vixen, living her controlled fantasy in Havana's forest, all is well. Once it is evident that they are on military grounds facing state officials, the control she is able to exert in her jinetera sphere or in her sexual fantasies with tourists does not translate to the world of the regime that she inhabits in the real world. Cornered, with two documented counts of disorderly conduct in public on her record, Tatiana is faced with incarceration unless Joan lies to and bribes the officials. Enraged at the predicament he—a credible and successful businessman—had been put in by this Eve turned “puta de mierda,” but aware of necessary silencing of this compromising matter, he completes his messianic duty. Content to have had Joan save her from the peril of imprisonment, Tatiana's true character shines at the moment that he drives her back to a road and suggests a future meeting while extending a \$20 bill. She says, “¡No! Seré jinetera, estaré necesitada, pero tu dinero no lo quiero, ¡yo soy una ramera por la dignidad!”⁹⁶ In tears because of this humiliation, stripped of her agency and the control all she has left is to assert that although she may be a prostitute, it is because of her dignity and her self-worth. She thus expresses the same sentiment as Zulema who understand the jinetera's plight as one

⁹⁶ Ibid 137.

against the demoralization and devaluing of Cuban women. In saying these concluding words, and tactfully choosing a euphemism for her profession, Tatiana confirms that despite outside forces, she can still exert control over her character, her dignity and her sense of self, and none of those are for sale.

Catty The ‘Temba’ and Idalmis the Groupie

Both Catty and Idalmis inform the narrator’s investigation into the world of *jineteras*, mentioned in the more detailed stories of Zulema, Martha and Adis, but they are not primary sources for the interviews. Their brief but meaningful mentions serve a purpose insofar as they represent Cuban women who are either rejected from that world of prostitution (Catty) or who are luckily exempt from the falling prey to its workings due to need (Idalmis). Both observers from within, Catty by participation and Idalmis by association, their experiences with that world of sex tourism marks their daily lives as subjects who form part of a national history and a Cuban women’s history tied to the realities of the Special Period.

Catty, unlike her interviewed counterparts, is an educated woman with a psychology degree who nonetheless joined the ranks of *jineteras* out of economic necessity. She had been set up with Felipe the Spaniard on a night when his first choice was taken by a Canadian tourist. A *temba* (middle aged woman) who usually hid her age well, Catty was rejected by the tourist whose initial reaction of disgust was later followed by him walking out on their double-date with Zulema and her client to see if he could

find a better prospect to end his evening.⁹⁷ For Zulema the memory of “la agonía que vivió Catty por culpa de ese comermierda” is unforgettable because la psicóloga could not overcome the complex Felipe had created for her.⁹⁸ Catty’s experience speaks to the emotional side of the business; it is clear that this is not just physical. Despite being smart enough (and trained by profession) to comprehend that it is all a performance where each character plays a role until time or money runs out, she is still a real woman with real feelings that were really hurt. The incident also showcases the support systems and networks that are firmly in place amongst *jineteras* who despite the acts they must put on remember the human face and the human sentiment behind those masks. Catty eventually fell in love with a young German man who went to the island to study Afro-Cuban percussion and he finally cured her of her complex. It seems that proverbially speaking, *un clavo saca otro clavo*.

Idalmis is a friend of Adis who, despite her opinion about it, was intrigued by the *jinetera* lifestyle and seemed to run in their circles quite often. This speaks to the sheer numbers of women taking up this form of subsistence. As the narrator explains:

Idalmis siente rechazo por todo ese mundo del jineteo, aunque admite que quisiera tener amigos extranjeros para escapar, huir de esa isla que quiere y que parece maldecida. Sabe que ellos van a lo que van y lo demás no le importa, para ella no son imprescindibles.⁹⁹

For this young woman, those involved in the sex tourism industry are not essential to her everyday existence. This is true because this daughter of a former Tropicana dancer

⁹⁷ Temba is a colloquial term used in Cuba to refer to a middle aged woman. When this woman is said to like younger men, temba takes on a meaning equivalent to *a cougar*.

⁹⁸ Bustamante 43.

⁹⁹ Ibid 102.

married to a Swedish man who resides in Stockholm lives comfortably with the remittances she receives. She has no need to engage in this world, she is a privileged female subject in Special Period Cuba and feel entitled to critique it. As she passes judgment on women such as Martha with her eleven Filipino sailors in one night she is painfully reminded by Adis that were it not for her mother's help, this Cuban mulata/Belgian woman would not only be highly solicited but overly employed by foreigners. As Adis tells her, "...es muy fácil hablar con la barriga llena."¹⁰⁰ It is ironic that she, who has it all by Special Period standards and doesn't have to sacrifice a thing as her *jinetera* friends must do, is the one who calls the island damned in the likes of the Musicóloga in *Maldita danza*. Perhaps it is cursed because she is surrounded by women with whom she has nothing in common, except maybe falling victim to stereotypes, being confused for a *jinetera*. Perhaps she feels it is damned because she suffers from insularism, yearning for contact with things foreign, yet she knows that as a young mulata the chances of a genuine exchange outside the sex tourism industry are implausible. Suffocated, trapped in a repeating island, she is still not bothered enough by her insular condition to abandon the island, not even for her well established family in Europe. She represents the paradoxical woman who wants to escape but is unwilling to, having the choice readily available. Although not a *jinetera*, Idalmis does exhibit traits of the third type of category of *jineteras* outlined by Kimmels who conforms to the tourist-like lifestyle at home thus refuting immigration in the likes of Catty.¹⁰¹ She is the woman who

¹⁰⁰ Ibid 101.

¹⁰¹ Kimmels 8. As Kimmels argues, three motives incite women to turn to prostitution: the economic necessity of earning a living under the economic crisis that followed the collapse of the Soviet bloc, their wish to finance or earn starting capital for studies or work in a chosen profession, and finally as a means of pursuing a better, tourist-like lifestyle.

cannot put herself in the *jineteras*' shoes and instead of building solidarity networks shuns them following the standards of proper women and the stereotypes instilled by a patriarchal society. Idalmis may not be a *jinetera* but her life is just as complex and filled with as many trials and tribulations, albeit for different reasons, as theirs.

Adis Pérez, Jinetera: Victim Vindicated

*...más allá del horizonte que contemplamos desde el Malecón hay vida, pero no es como la imaginamos.*¹⁰²

The victim whose tragic story inspires the investigative work that leads the reader through the reconstructed world of Havana's *jineteras*, Adis Pérez, is the woman whose death is vindicated through the writing of the journalist's literary text. A paradigmatic dreamer whose vivid imagination allowed her to play pretend even at the age of twenty seven, where she lived a life in a place other than the insular one she was imprisoned by, Adis employed escapism as a weapon against reality. Naïve, hopeful and determined to one day achieve her storybook ending as the Cuban Sissi, Empress of the Caribbean, in a land other than her own, the young *jinetera* follows a man four times her age to an abusive and violent life far from the one she imagined.¹⁰³

With the onset of the Special Period, the engineer who worked for the state's agricultural sector became a "luchadora muy divertida" who took advantage of the fact

¹⁰² Bustamante 42.

¹⁰³ Sissi or Empress Elisabeth of Austria was the Empress of the Austro-Hungarian empire. Historically, she is considered to have been a non-conformist who abhorred conventional court protocol and at the same time a tragic figure due to her assassination by a stab wound to the heart. Adis Pérez left Cuba for Vienna and was stabbed in the heart by her lover Alois Grill.

that “la mujer cubana ya se había convertido en un tremendo negocio.”¹⁰⁴ She represents the type of Cuban woman who journalists in the likes of Sara Más Farías of the Havana-based magazine *Mujeres* would laud as a highly educated working woman aware of her worth in a new economy and having the intelligence to cater to tourists. The emphasis on the educated woman resonates with Fidel Castro’s own reflections in Oliver Stone’s 2003 documentary *Comandante* where he proudly assumes responsibility for giving the world “prostitutas universitarias.” In the novel, Adis’s unsolicited encounter with a young man from Madrid, José Miguel, her first night on the job attests to the ways in which she understood her new role in Cuban society. She says,

Si nos ponemos a pensar en serio, ¿sabes por qué soy jinetera? Porque así hago un poco de oposición al régimen. Nosotras le demostramos al extranjero lo que es esto de verda’. Y te digo una cosa, me voy a meter en esto pero mi vista está puesta en la cima. He vivido muchas historias de amor y ahora estoy sola. Ojalá y encuentre un hombre joven, extranjero, que nos enamoremos y tengamos un romance de campeonato.¹⁰⁵

For Adis, her involvement in the sex tourism industry is as much about survival as about subversive tactics to unmask the myth about societal equality projected by Castro’s regime. She suggests that a country whose governing system has been successful in achieving this goal for its citizens, regardless of trying economic times, would not undo a socialist project of four decades for the immediate benefits of capitalist carnal exchange system that demoralizes its women. *Jineteras* dismantles the myth of Cuba as the last bastion of the socialist world and their work is indicative of what that ideal world has

¹⁰⁴ Bustamante 64.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid 97.

made of its women. As Adis says, “Soy como me hace mi país.”¹⁰⁶ Too fresh to be jaded by the street life at this point, she is hopeful that prince charming will make his way to el Malecón from a land far, far away. Ironically, it is Adis the dreamer who schools the young Spaniard on the realities of the 1990s who, on his first trip to Cuba is baffled and horrified by the *jineterismo* he witnesses. Pensive, he says, “No te imaginas lo que esta isla representa para los españoles que aún creemos en la revolución.” The text thus proposes a generational difference in perspectives about Cuba and the Revolution amongst male Spanish tourists. Adis is the only *jinetera* in the novel who encounters a Spaniard who having romanticized the Revolution voices not only concern but discontent with its present state. The other *gallegos* and *pepes* from Madrid and Barcelona, like the ones Adis accuses of being friends of Castro, are simply reaping the personal benefits of a failed system. Likewise, it is in this encounter that the text addresses the similar points of view between two seemingly unlike character, the *jinetera* and the tourist. Both young, rebellious and firm believers in commitment to the integrity of socio-political movements, they are more alike than the place and conditions under which they met would indicate. Like Adis, he too walks the streets of a city “soñada y desgastada por el sacrificio y la indiferencia.”¹⁰⁷ What became of the young Spaniard is a mystery and never again, amongst the scores of Spaniards that lined her closet with fine garments and left her with memories of trans-Atlantic sexual conquests, does she find a Spanish man with a social conscience. At least she found a Spaniard with a conscience who later

¹⁰⁶ Ibid 97.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid 42.

conquered her heart in José Miguel who filled her with the illusion of “trasladarse a Madrid en su mirada”.¹⁰⁸

Jose Miguel’s trip to Cuba was spurred by a culturally engrained curiosity for the island. “Quería descubrir ese encanto del que tanto se habla en España.”¹⁰⁹ His motives speak to the renewed ties between both countries in the wake of the Special Period. The reference may be in relation to increased visibility in tourism promotions as evidenced by Zulema’s husband finding booked travel to Cuba for the holidays. An industry fueled primarily by Spanish investment that must satisfy its commercial needs takes advantage of the opening of the island to foreigners and re-inserts Cuba into the Spanish national imaginary. As his interest for the island translated into an interest of the more than carnal type for Adis, she quickly became enamored and he too was smitten, returning to the island four times in one year. Painfully aware of her subject position yet in love she confesses, “Tal vez no me creas porque he sido para ti como un vaso con agua para un hombre sediento, pero para mí tú has sido todo.”¹¹⁰ Imagining an impossible future with a man who had his wife and kids in Madrid, her nightmare of having “un jodido amor español” came true.¹¹¹ Hardened by the disillusionment she learns that business cannot mix with pleasure and a jaded, calculating Adis is born, soon to encounter a man who was more calculating than she could imagine.

Mientras, en otro lado de la Habana, grupos de adolescentes y jóvenes deambulaban para encontrar el premio del día: un extranjero es como ganarse la lotería y Adis ya estaba jugando al duro y sin guante. Se jugaría el todo por el

¹⁰⁸ Ibid 122.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid 122.

¹¹⁰ Ibid 126.

¹¹¹ Ibid 127.

todo, con la misma desesperación que tiene el que arroja una botella al mar, otra víctima del naufragio revolucionario.¹¹²

Shortly, in the arms of Alois Grill, Adis would become the casualty foretold by *el tambor* in Matanzas.

Adis fell victim to a deranged Austrian octogenarian who gave no signs of his violent nature while courting her. Both had portrayed stellar roles for their own convenience—Alois wearing the mask of the loving man who would care for his valued mulata and Adis that of Empress Sissi. Having successfully accomplished her escapist routine, Adis soon found Vienna to be as unwelcoming as the arms of the now overly jealous and violent old man who imprisoned her, albeit in a majestic castle-like mansion, just as he had a young Brazilian woman before her. On the rare occasions she was allowed to leave the house, Adis felt that same racism and overwhelmingly oppressive European male gaze upon her mulata body that the other *jineteras* and Diaz-Pimienta's Musicóloga experienced in Madrid. "Adis se sentía discriminada en su vida cotidiana" the narrator says, highlighting one instance where at an auto repair shop Adis had seen a sign that read "Aquí no se atienden ni turcos, ni africanos, ni rusos, ni yugoslavos, ni cubanos, ni mexicanos, ni dominicanos".¹¹³ Adis, aware of the extreme xenophobia in her new host city was at a loss and felt inconsolably alone.¹¹⁴ Adis's only escape from her

¹¹² Ibid 129.

¹¹³ Ibid 196.

¹¹⁴ According to the Migration Study Institute based in Washington D.C., The fall of the Iron Curtain triggered widespread fears of massive migration flows from Eastern Europe, and the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia sparked massive inflows of refugees from areas to Austria's southeast. These flows came in addition to a rapidly rising number of asylum seekers from various countries around the world. By the mid-1990s, immigration legislation reforms promoted the integration of aliens already present in Austria, in the place of new immigration. This concept was called "integration before immigration," and the law became known as the "integration package." <http://www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/display.cfm?ID=105>

solitary confinement—in the house and in greater Viennese society—came in the form of reading Empress Sissi’s diary which recounted her daily thoughts in 1898 and her own letters to Zulema telling her of her sense of displacement, defenselessness at the hands of her “viejo emperador.”¹¹⁵ Adis fought in her own war of independence against Alois, the vestige of empire, in attempting to flee and found her death by his enraged hands. With a bullet to the heart in the same mode of Sissi, Empress Sissi of the Caribbean had lost a war that was never hers to win.

Adis’s Story Told: A Journalist’s Memories and Reflections

“Y desde aquel día, en que ya había comenzado a mirar a la revolución con otros ojos comprendí que mujer y cubana, tiene un valor muy grande, hayas elegido o no el camino de las jineteras.”¹¹⁶

Having pieced together the story of Adis Pérez through various primary sources: newspaper clippings, testimony gathered in formal and informal conversations with Zulema and the *santera mayor*, as well as letters written by Adis, the novel’s journalist reflects on the closure the project has brought her. She ends the novel revealing her own past as a journalist in Castro’s Cuba whose job it was, in retrospect, to misinform the masses of the glories of the Revolution. Removed from the world of *las jineteras*, inhabiting a plush residence far from the streets Adis and her colleagues walked in search

¹¹⁵ Bustamante 201.

¹¹⁶ Ibid 203.

of a ticket out of their misery, she had believed in the stories and histories that had been professionally distorted for public knowledge. The realities of Cuban women fueling the tourist economy with their bodies were foreign to her until she did a live feed on a raid in this occult world. As a journalist, she witnessed government officials physically violating *jineteras'* bodies in search of dollars to pocket and to get cheap thrills in name of the Revolution. That day, with the blindfold lifted from her eyes, she realized the greater meaning of being a Cuban woman in Special Period Cuba. It is precisely from the diasporic position that the journalist's autobiographical memory is jogged, giving her a sense of self that proves to be dual in nature. As Edward S. Reed argues in the biography *James J. Gibson and the Psychology of Perception*, autobiographical memory supposes both remembering and the remembered self. It is an exercise in "the me-experiencing-now-becoming aware of a prior-me-experiencing its (prior) environment."¹¹⁷ The investigative and writing process allows the protagonist to, from Madrid, remember both the Cuba she left behind as well as the version of herself tied to that memory. It is thus that one unresolved memory of abuse which fuels the present project of writing the *jinetera* into the history of Special Period Cuba and is crucial to her understanding of self as a vindicator of Adis and the other women's experiences narrated throughout the text. In *The Remembering Self: Construction and Accuracy in the Self-Narrative*, Ulric Neisser speaks to this phenomenon:

The remarkable thing is not just that past events influence the present but that they are explicitly reconstructed by the person who experienced them. By definition, such reconstructions are examples of *episodic memory*. If the remembered event seems to have played a significant part in the life of the rememberer, it becomes

¹¹⁷ Edward S. Reed. *James J. Gibson and the Psychology of Perception*. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press 1988) Chapter 15.

an example of *autobiographical memory* and may form part of a *life narrative*. Life narratives are significant because they are one way of defining the self.¹¹⁸

Free to speak, uncensored, as a journalist and as a Cuban woman who lived the deception and disillusionment of a predatory system that failed its mothers, daughters, and granddaughters, writing about Adis is her protest against patriarchy. Within the already discussed framework of testimonial literature she choose for the telling of *jineteras'* accounts, the paratextual voice of the journalist narrator exhibits traits of what Alberto Moreiras—in his book *The Exhaustion of Difference*—calls “a metaphoric relation with the testimonial subject through an assumed and voluntaristically affirmed solidarity with it.”¹¹⁹

The choice to speak from the perspective, albeit fictive, of a journalist in this protest is a meaningful one when the history of *jineterismo* is considered. In *Economies of Desire: Sex and Tourism in Cuba*, Amalia Cabezas traces the beginnings of the international *jinetera* craze to the media frenzy over the resurgence of prostitution in Cuba which “buzzed with accounts of cheap, sexy and brown Cuban bodies for sale.”¹²⁰ More concretely, she pinpoints a 1991 *Playboy* article published in the crux of a Special Period economy. Cabeza explains that the Cuban Ministry of Tourism was hosting a team of writers and photographers from the American men’s magazine notorious for featuring

¹¹⁸ Neisser 1.

¹¹⁹ Alberto Moreiras. *The Exhaustion of Difference: The Politics of Latin American Cultural Studies*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001) 215.

¹²⁰ Amalia Cabezas. *Economies of Desire: Sex and Tourism in Cuba*. (Philadelphia, Temple University Press: 2009) 2.

photographs of nude women with a series of very lavish accommodations in order to reap the benefits of selling Cuban sex. She says,

The *Playboy* article, appearing at a crucial moment of political and economic uncertainty and transition, introduced an era of mixed market economy in Cuba and initiated a decade of growth in tourism, tourist-oriented liaisons, and marriage to foreigners... The *Playboy* article ushered in a period of painful transitions for all Cubans, with women becoming the shock absorbers for the many changes that such cultural, social and economic shift entail.¹²¹

The report made novel, and here Lissette Bustamante resorts to the doubling of self, was thus the journalist narrator's contribution to the other side of the untold story, the one where that the media humanizes the *jinetera*, rescues her name from the demeaning gaze of objectification promoted by the Cuban government. This completed journalistic endeavor—fighting the system with its own sword—is what ultimately allows both the narrator journalist to be at peace and for Adis to rest in peace. The narrator completing her data collection for her report coincides with the completion of the written novel, *Jineteras*, by impied author Lissette Bustamante and thus closure is achieved on the fictive and non-fictive levels. It is in the therapeutic act of writing about Adis that she can find peace within herself for not having been able to do more in Cuba. She thanks Adis for giving her this closure in the following way,

Me has ayudado a tirarme en este océano de la literatura para que emerja la gente, el momento, el diálogo y la acción de una tierra presente y a veces desconocida. Una imagen diferente y abismal entre el original y la copia que exhibe la propaganda de los hombres que visten de verde olivo.¹²²

¹²¹ Ibid 1-2.

¹²² Ibid 79.

Her reflections—as a journalist living in exile in Madrid—speak to the possibilities that testimonial literature create as observed by George Gugelberger and Michael Kearney in *Voices for the Voiceless: Testimonial Literature in Latin America*. Testimonial literature “is emerging as a part of a global reordering of the social and economic contexts for power/difference within which ‘literature’ is produced and consumed”¹²³ It is also in writing that she realizes the indispensable role that Madrid and its tight-knit Cuban community has had in restoring her contestatory voice.

Su historia me conmovió tanto que comencé a hurgar dentro de mí. A buscar en la rabia, en mi madurez y en las grietas de todos. Recordé que hace muchos años comenzó la diáspora. Hay cubanos en tantos lugares del mundo, hasta en los más insospechados. Lo terrible es palpar la inutilidad de la vida actual de la isla.¹²⁴

The privilege of the diasporic subject position from which she narrates is one rooted in a nostalgic silence that laden with hope for a return is rooted in the reality of its impossibility. Her personal narrative is as fragmented as the structure of the novel and as fragmented as the life stories of Adis, Zulema, Patricia, Martha, Catty, Idalmis and all the other Cuban men and women who form part of the Cuban community abroad. The fragmentation—personal and collective alike, an inherent part of the migratory experience—is only smoothed by the completed novel. Adis’s story told, Cuba’s Special Period story told, the *jineteras*’ stories told, her own story told, she retraces the greater history of the Madrid’s Cuban diaspora. As she and her sources celebrate their symbolic victory over silence in the written word, the sense of being whole again is restored.

¹²³ George Gugelberger and Michael Kearney. “Voices for the Voiceless: Testimonial Literature in Latin America,” *Latin American Perspectives*. vol. 18 no. 3 (July 1991) 3-14, 6.

¹²⁴ Bustamante 82.

Queríamos deambular por la magia de los años que atesora cada una de sus calles más castizas y acogedoras. Parecemos un grupo de turistas pero de turistas en realidad, no tenemos nada. Sentimos y padecemos esta ciudad como cualquier español. A nosotros Madrid también muchas veces se nos viene encima, nos aplasta, es como si la ciudad no creyera en lágrimas y nos obligara a andar con el mazo dando. Andamos con el recuerdo de las palmeras que dejamos en la sabana cubana.¹²⁵

It is the streets of Madrid, where she once sought the rock of truth and now akin to the streets of Cuba, that witness her triumphant finds as a journalist and as a woman who belongs to Spain's Cuban diaspora.

¹²⁵ Ibid 181.

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