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Author

Lima, Lázaro

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5

Locas al Rescate

The Transnational Hauntings of Queer *Cubanidad*

Lázaro Lima

Can we speak of a distinctly queer Cuban transnationalism?[1] If so, what practices of freedom—the classic Foucaultian ethic of the care of the self[2]—might this migratory variant adopt to cope with political exile and emotive sexile? This chapter explores these two heuristic propositions by analyzing the practices of freedom initiated by a group of self-identified queer Cuban *balseros* (rafters) and Marielitos who were known as the Locas al Rescate (Queens [or queers] to the Rescue) on the South Beach (SoBe) club circuit of the early 1990s.[3] The group explicitly parodied the rightist-identified organization Hermanos al Rescate (Brothers to the Rescue) and its humanitarian work of rescuing rafters at sea by "rescuing" unsuspecting club goers from the club fashion faux pas and, more important, from the historical amnesia surrounding the most present of the group's concerns: the plight of Cuban rafters in SoBe's hypervisual culture of surface but politically vapid cultural geography and the evocation of those who disappeared at sea during the height of the raft exodus following Cuba's Special Period (Período Especial) of economic collapse and energy shortages after the fall of the Soviet bloc.

I take the Cuban rafter experience as emblematic of Cuban transnational identity and community making outside the traditional, empirically driven economy of transnational studies.[4] I do this to question how forms of unquantifiable queer loving through the performances of Cuban American cultural memory can produce practices of freedom that fall outside the grasp of traditional social science accounts of the transnational, accounts that too often lack the critical vocabulary of feeling.[5] These practices of freedom are more subtle but no less engaging than those imagined on a national scale, because they participate in public life by making private history, needs, and desires publicly visible and rendered on the terms established by Cuban American queers. The performances of freedom staged by Locas al Rescate can therefore

be understood as self-constituting identity practices that name the terms of engagement with the memory of the Cuban national culture, the sexiled queer forms of being, and the Cuban exiled community's marginalization of queer forms of *being* Cuban through abjectification (see note 14). In its strictly Foucaultian sense, these practices of freedom constitute an "ethics of self-making" that produce spectacles of Cuban and Cuban American history by minoritarian subjects who position themselves within a history that has been dismissive of their participation. As José Esteban Muñoz reminds us, these types of identity practices "cannot be undervalued in relation to the formation of counterpublics that contest the hegemonic supremacy of the majoritarian public sphere" because these spectacles, he notes, "offer the minoritarian subject a space to situate itself in history and thus seize social agency" (Muñoz 1999: 1). In this sense, these queer Cuban practices of freedom create an alternative and visible cultural memory that foregrounds those modes of being Cuban that fall outside hegemonic understandings of what it means to be Cuban or Cuban American.

The story of the cultural networks forged by Cubans, as well as by other immigrants, has usually been narrowly focused on the empiricist grounds of knowing, on the quantifiable world of numbers, demographics, political affiliations, and the attendant methodologies of the quantifiable world. I come to this engagement as both witness and scholar in an auto-ethnography of self interpolated in community networks too often ignored by the limits of quantifiable experience. Yet the autobiographical act in scholarship, the interpolation of self within the confines of an academic discipline, is a risky proposition. Not surprisingly, the fusion of subject and object of study in disciplines that require evidentiary protocols supported by statistics is usually seen as suspect. How can the subject, after all, know the dancer from the dance when she is subject, object, and choreographer at once? In almost any act of self-disclosure one's motives are never disinterested, and I do not pretend to be an exception. But to rely almost exclusively on the measurable world is to rely too singularly on an Enlightenment legacy that cannot always account for the contradictions and possibilities of complex personhood. Transnational studies, coming from a social science as beleaguered as anthropology,[6] has relied too singularly on empirical explanations for processes embedded in *affective* motivations—the heavy density of feeling surrounding what García Cancliní (1995) has termed *las estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad*, the strategies for stepping in and out of the binds and incomplete promises of modernity. There is intellectual and human impoverishment, too many missed opportunities, when we neglect the private worlds we inhabit and all the personal and cultural hauntings that tie us to those geographies of memory that clamor for attention when we least expect it. I feel and hear it all too often, more than I care to: "Mi

hijo, lo sacrificamos todo por ti. . . . Lo sacrificamos todo por ti" (My son, we've sacrificed it all for you. . . . We've sacrificed it all for you).[7] But more about that later.

Balseros

Balseros cross national boundaries, both literal (the nation) and imaginary (the seascape of ambivalent citizenship), in rafts made of flimsy found objects ranging from particle board to the inner tubes of tires, all in the hope of being swept into the mostly placid northerly movement of the Gulf Stream that swirls objects, people, and desires ashore. The rafter experience itself has galvanized a series of literary, cultural, and political interventions on the status and presumed privilege of Cuban exiles seeking refuge in south Florida. As a subject of fiction, Cuban rafters have been interpolated in the American literary imagination in novels such as John Sayles' *Los Gusanos: A Novel* (1991) and J. Joaquín Fraxedas' *The Lonely Crossing of Juan Cabrera* (1993). In diatribes in the local and national press about Elián González's plight (1999), in films such as Luis Felipe Bernaza's *Estado del Tiempo/Changing Tides* (1994) and Bosch and Domènech's *Balseros* (2002), and in Hermanos al Rescate's search for rafters—both literal and political—the *balsero* experience reactivated a generational rift in the way the Cuban diaspora has been represented and understood in the public sphere (Habermas 1989).

The queer manifestations of this rift were interpolated in club circuit spaces by a group of self-described *locas* (literally, "crazy women"; pejoratively, "queer men" or "queens") who hounded the 1990s SoBe club scene with fashion pointers that derided both Lycra-clad *musculosos* and self-styled Cuban *sofisticados* whose near-dead political pulse was suddenly and ardently charged through the public-space takeovers staged by this group. Locas al Rescate takeovers often parodied and at times satirized many of the public humanitarian pronouncements of Hermanos al Rescate by drawing attention to the plight of recent Cuban arrivals, rafters, and other "dry footers"[8] who were the symbolic beneficiaries of Hermanos al Rescate's largesse but seemed to be forgotten once they made it ashore. Before addressing the Locas al Rescate's practices of freedom, their move from parody to activism, and queer ethnic remembrance as a practice of freedom, I situate their parodic referent within the Cuban American imaginary.

From its inception, Hermanos al Rescate attempted to consolidate a public identity inflected with its stated humanitarian goals—saving rafters fleeing Castro's Cuba—rather than with its overtly political associations with the so-called Cuban mafia, the exiled political right. What interests me here, however, are not the well-known and complex political invectives for or against carica-

tures of either the right or the left. I am interested, rather, in the potential of performances of *cubanidad* to tell us about Cuban American negotiations of a queer identity vis-à-vis the appropriation of community-specific modalities of political expression through the evocation of love and loss. Ultimately, the question is, How does one engage with a political discourse so preoccupied with authenticating Cuban identity by righting past political slights that it becomes difficult to imagine a Cuban or Cuban American identity outside the context of national borders or that nostalgic longing for the restoration of a wholeness that may never have been? As I noted, I am particularly interested in moving away from Cuban and Cuban American studies' dependence on an empiricism and a "proof"-driven academic imperative that ultimately depoliticize the realm of the imaginary worlds we inhabit and the feelings that drive much of what we can quantify as the locus of exilic consciousness, the observable world manifested through feeling.

Mi hijo, lo sacrificamos todo por ti. . . . Lo sacrificamos todo por ti.

Cuban Transnational Hauntings

It is haunting to hear your parents' explanation of that prolonged state of melancholia they've lived in as exiles. You see and hear it in your sleep when you dream them in syllables and smell, the textures of their past imagined from frayed black-and-white photographs that come to life when you least expect it. In your sleep you see someone's parent, a woman pregnant with thought, on her wedding day, distracted in white and knowing that her beloved would soon leave the island. Se tuvo que ir . . . por puente aéreo a España (*He had to leave . . . via Spain*), *or so the story goes. It is a narrative about your father, you realize. There are constants in the narrative, with subtle changes over the years: his exact age at the time, his last words to her before leaving on Cubana de Aviación, the poems he wrote to her about longing and loss, a lost wedding ring, and ultimately a memory of betrayal that through the years accumulated details so subtle they beg questions impossible for a son to ask. It could be someone else's story but it is your own.*

The personal history of feeling is the emotional fuel that feeds actions quantifiable by social science methodologies. Indeed, that is Avery F. Gordon's contention in her brilliant book, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (1997). Gordon (1997) engages Horkheimer and Adorno's critique of modernity *in The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944),[9] in order to designate a space of meaning that recognizes the weight of memory, the contours of feeling, and the shape of longing. She does so by pointing out signifi-

cant limitations and oversights in the way social science is conducted and social life is observed and described. For Gordon this requires a fundamental change in the way we know and make knowledge, and entails a "thoroughgoing epistemological critique of modernity as what is contemporaneously ours with an insurgent sociological critique of its forms of domination" (Gordon 1997: 10–11). Further, it requires scrutinizing one's hauntings:

> To be haunted and to write from that location, to take on the condition of what you study, is not a methodology or a consciousness you can simply adopt or adapt as a set of rules or an identity; it produces its own insights and blindnesses. To be haunted and to write from that location . . . is about making a contact that changes you and refashions the social relations in which you are located. It is about putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look. It is sometimes about writing ghost stories, stories that not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, toward a countermemory, for the future. (Gordon 1997: 22)

I have focused on the intersections of personal and cultural history in order to contextualize the *intrahistorias* (inner stories, inner histories) that drive our intellectual will to power, our own objects of study, and how and why we produce knowledge about *cubanía* in the present for the future. The narrative textures of personal experience that manifest themselves in our own work, as well as the affective ties we discard or refuse to recognize, bind us to an unexplored realm of knowledge that will remain depoliticized until Cuban and Cuban American studies recognizes—perforce—the space of feeling in the production of knowledge about *cubanía* (in or outside of the Miami bubble) and the performances of nationalism that presumably define a *cubanidad* at large which must be interrogated.

One of the fundamental problems that results when individual *intrahistorias* begin to saturate public consciousness is that they begin to stand in for the whole community. This creates a hegemony of feeling, if you will, that makes dissenters prisoners in *cubanía*'s house of meaning, genealogical isolates who are not Cuban American, much less Cuban, because they cannot remember or they remember differently the narratives of nationalism that bestow permanent residency in Cuba's house of mirrors—a symbolic citizenship in the public sphere of *cubanidad* in exile. To say that you stand outside of *cubanía*'s hegemony of feeling is to say that you stand outside of history.

> *In New York City you meet dancers from a Cuban troupe whose name you will not mention. You let them know that you are Cuban and convivial warmth turns to stolid rhetoric:* "¿Tú, cubano? No señorito, tú no

eres cubano. Tú vives aquí" [*You, Cuban? No sir, you are not Cuban. You live here*].

The hegemony of feeling is a Janus-like coin, monolithic and impenetrable on either side of the political façade.

You learn that one of the dancers from the troupe attempts to defect but after "falling ill from fatigue," he is returned to Cuba for a rest.

There are tremendous emotional investments involved in saving face, regardless of which side of the *cubanidad* coin you are on.

Queer Transnationalism and the Politics of Place

Performances of presumed Cuban affective authenticity are re-created every day in the media markets of Miami. For those of us born shortly before or after 1970 and raised in the United States, SoBe became the locus of a legitimated *cubanidad*. Whether we lived in Miami or not, the SoBe scene had an identity that marked *cubanidad* as hip, culturally identifiable, and legitimate. And for those of us who were coming of age intellectually in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it became evident that the two most public versions of *cubanidad*—the 1959 and Mariel generations—were giving way to a transnational *cubanidad* whose two most defining features at the time were the Cuban-inflected SoBe scene and the rafters who were arriving in droves as a result of Cuba's Special Period.[10] I say transnational *cubanidad* because it was not just the rafter experience that highlighted the obvious crossing of national borders but also the SoBe scene's highly visual economy of signs that were disseminated throughout and cemented in the North American and European imaginary through tourism. Miami and SoBe became the destination of choice for European travelers, according to European tour operators catering to the upwardly mobile, hip, and pretty wannabes from the other side of the pond (Germans, Spaniards, and Italians, in particular). This commodified and marketed *cubanidad* had a curious outcome: It fabricated a ready-made identity for young urban Cuban Americans (Yucas) both in and outside of Miami, an identity that made Cuban affiliation in the United States analogous to a previous generational tension among Cuban Americans. Like the exiled post-1959 Cuban Americans who disidentified from the often-derided Marielitos who came after them, the Yucas identified with the presumed progenitors of Miami's transformations; that is, the post-1959 Cubans who presumably had created the social architecture that could allow SoBe to thrive. It was an identification that disidentified Yucas from rafters, in much the same way as pre-1980 Cubans disidentified themselves from Marielitos. This mythic nationalistic recourse to the presumed origins of an exile identity rooted in the 1959 diaspora, of course, ob-

scured a very different reality that had more to do with the influx of foreign capital into SoBe's economy. (I am thinking of tourism again, in particular, the German rediscovery of SoBe's Art Deco district as well as the bustling drug trade.) Another reality was the influx of gays, many of whom were Marielitos themselves, who found—at least until the late 1980s—affordable housing and creative space to thrive: Cuban queers with nothing to lose who left Cuba not only because they were hungry but because they wanted to believe that across the Florida Straits one could be a *maricón con plumas* (a fag with feathers), *muchas plumas*. It was and is the desire for political *and* sexual personhood that makes many Cuban queers leave despite the only one in four odds of making it alive to *la otra orilla* (the other shore; artificially divided since the 1960s, the two Cubas have often been called *las dos orillas*). Even today a significant number of Miami Cubans consider themselves exiles awaiting the restoration of what for many is an illusory unity, and we do not venture to contemplate the number of Cubans on the island living in "sexile" and yearning to depart toward a different type of wholeness. Politics and economic hardship, unquestionably severe, tell only part of the story. Indeed, one can legitimately ask the obvious: How many claimed political oppression—real as it was and is—as a safe way to move toward a more complete sexual personhood?[11]

It is common to assert that queer desire crosses gender, ethnic, racial, and class lines. In the queer Cuban transnational context, I say it is yearning that cuts and, paradoxically, unites the breadth of difference and experience for Cubans outside the island as well those on the island who yearn to leave, irrespective of sexual identity (explicit or occluded). Yearning is the place from which both heternormative and queer identities forge ties to forms of personhood that require fulfillment in an imaginary *elsewhere*. The identitarian slippage between being unwanted because you are queer and being unwanted because you are an antirevolutionary is fraught with uncomfortable parallels. Both are interpolated as Other—"you are not Cuban"—by a national state apparatus that, paradoxically, is replaced by its proxy in exile, a community that turns its back on Marielitos, *balseros*, *locas*, and queers, much like the Cuban state did with queers (sexual-political dissenters) and *gusanos*[12] (desexed, that is, "heteronormalized" political dissenters) when they were on the island. This *elsewhere* functions as a *bugarronería* of sentiment meant to displace these suspect Cubans yet again in a permanent *other* place, as if to say that irrespective of queer affiliation, gay or "straight," you are fucked by a new *bugarrón* called exile.[13] Identity as lack—"you are not Cuban"—supplants compulsory heteronormativity with a compulsory *cubanía* that makes dissenters wait in the same holding cell of abject citizenship. If this form of majoritarian subjugation did not discriminate on the identitarian basis of sexual object choice, it certainly did so once Marielitos and rafters attempted to navigate the economies of *cubanidad* in south Florida, the limited forms of belonging

(economic and social) available to post-1980 Cuban arrivals. The most creative responses came from the *abjectified*; that is, those with the least to lose.[14] These were queer Cubans who negotiated exile and sexile as inclusive qualities of being, not mutually exclusive conditions of being, and they did so through telling and performative practices of freedom that understood the categories of place (where we want to be) and person (who we want to be) as necessarily mobile imaginaries founded on desires premised on the possibility of fulfillment: *being* someplace in order to *be* sometime.

It is not a stretch to concede that for Yucas Miami became an Aztlán of sorts without, of course, the strong class critique initiated by their Chicano counterparts in the western and southwestern United States.[15] Like the Mexican American Aztlán, the mythic Southwest home of the Aztec whose symbology was appropriated by Chicanos during the 1960s as a locus of an empowered identity, Miami became a way station for displaced geographies of *cubanidad*. If for Chicanos Aztlán became the mythic space where geography and memory could serve as the progenitors of a collective fiction of identity, then Miami became the way station, a necessary stop, on the road to a Cuban American identity: Miami was the space where memory became the ontological force of *cubanidad* in exile, identity as a displaced geography from which the subject can fetishize memory, and make non-belonging, or its melancholic deferral, the principal mode of quotidian experience, the essence of exile.

Hijo, we've sacrificed it all for you. . . .

Indeed, narratives of self-abnegation became one of the organizing principles for an exile consciousness that deferred and projected the parents' memory of loss and lost youth onto Yucas. At the time, Yucas were referred to as "Generation Ñ" in the south Florida magazine of the same name (a title no doubt inspired by Douglas Coupland's novel *Generation X: Tales from an Accelerated Culture* (1991) about middle-class, Anglo-American twenty-something ennui and boredom). Like the magazine, which sought to capture the market share of hip *cubanidad* in the early to mid-1990s, members of Generation Ñ could traffic in their parents' nostalgia and the memory of loss with Cohiba Cigar T-shirts; food and dance music inflected with the memory of displacement; and plastic busts of San Lázaro, Santa Barbara, and la Caridad del Cobre; not to mention the rise of a white-ified Santería for the spiritually needy, all safely marketed and consumed in the cultural spaces of Metro Dade and SoBe where, unlike the old and often reactionary Calle Ocho, for example, memory was safely depoliticized. These were spaces where politics and the real force of material loss could be safely commemorated through consumption of *cubanía* during the day before heading out to clubs like the Warsaw Ballroom, the Torpedo, Hombre, the Paragon (before the artist for-

merly known as Prince purchased it), and, depending on the night or one's sexual proclivities, the notorious Flamingo Park, the "after hours" of choice for SoBe *musculosos* and their admirers, including straight-laced, though not quite straight, Yucas on X (Ecstasy). (A memorable event from late 1994 comes to mind, when residents around Flamingo Park began to complain to the local authorities about the number of men going into the mangroves and police entrapment plots ensued in and out of these mangroves. Curiously, the local circuit scene came to the rescue; I remember one venue in particular where sand, shrubs, plants, Astroturf, and bleachers were set up to simulate Flamingo Park in the safety of police-free interiors. In other words, even promiscuity became safely depoliticized.)

One of the worst features of this type of *cubanidad*—that is, *cubanidad* as nostalgic commodity disengaged from political work—is that while our generational counterparts in Cuba were busy producing knowledge of and about *las dos orillas*, the intellectual conditions of possibility for thinking and theorizing new approaches to *cubanidad* in institutionalized venues such as the U.S. academy became impoverished precisely when they were needed the most. No longer heirs to an intellectual will to power, like the first generation of Cuban-born, U.S.-trained academics, Cuban, Cuban American, and Cuban intellectual sympathizers paradoxically left a good part of the generational, cultural, and literary theorizing to those trained in Cuba. This is not categorically wrong, of course; you do not have to be trained in a specific way or place to establish a viable intellectual project. But it is wrong to depoliticize a field of inquiry from the place where the project stands to lose the most if left to fester in a reactionary environment, an environment where the political dialogue for some still centers on imagining what will happen when Castro dies.

Such impoverished imaginings are what Iván de la Nuez laments in one of the few sustained critical reflections on *cubanidad* in and out of Cuba, *La balsa perpetua: soledad y conexiones de la cultura cubana* (1998).[16] For de la Nuez, the rafter experience is ultimately emblematic of the Cuban condition, which for him is tantamount to an identity in search of a project. That is, there is no sustained critique of *cubanidad* in the public sphere, because the public identities negotiated are mere reflections or caricatures of a stunted project for both the left—of which there isn't much to speak of—and the right. In other words, for de la Nuez, if the *razón de ser* (raison d'être) of the right is disidentifying with Communism as it is popularly understood, then the left has been too busy justifying why it is neither Communist nor socialist. Referring to the 1990s, he notes with aplomb (de la Nuez 1998: 140, emphasis in the original):

> *Uno de los aspectos más interesantes de Miami es la cantidad de personajes de la ciudad que han sido formados en un régimen comunista (el cubano) y que hoy forman parte del grupo de notables de la ciudad.*

> *Pintores de renombre, empresarios, académicos, voceros radiofónicos, propietarios de clubes nocturnos, estrellas de la música y un largo etcétera. Todo esto hace de Miami una ciudad* poscomunista, *una afirmación que horrorizaría a la ultraderecha cubana o al propio canon wasp que retorna con toda su fuerza en Estados Unidos.*
>
> (One of the most interesting aspects of Miami is the number of characters from the city who have been formed in a Communist regime [the Cuban one] and who today form part of the city's group of notables. Painters of renown, entrepreneurs, academics, disc jockeys, nightclub owners, music stars, and a long etcetera. All of this makes Miami a *post-Communist* city, an affirmation that would horrify the Cuban far right or the very WASP canon that has returned with all its strength in the United States.)

De la Nuez goes on to note that identitarian projects are temporally dialogic in nature as they seek a political future, not the righting of a political past; that is, they involve a critical dialogue with the *past* in the *present* in the hope of a more democratic *future*.

One of de la Nuez's few conceptual blind spots is his inability to see beyond Habermasian modalities of counterpublics; in other words, he comes dangerously close to saying that viable political work can only be undertaken in the public sphere. Indeed, what he considers "the lost Cuban American generation of the nineties" did much of its political lifesaving and life-altering work in the streets, parks, and circuit venues of places such as SoBe. When Lincoln Road was home to productive art studios, when there was no Gap, no Pottery Barn, when the suburban crowd still hadn't found its way across the causeway, the political vanguard of activism was undertaken by the likes of Locas al Rescate. Whether it was condom distribution or safe sex education, *bugarrones* with desires in Flamingo Park but wives in la Saogüecera (Little Havana in southwest Miami), queer community workers tried to educate and create conditions of possibility for recent and not so recent arrivals to survive the demagoguery of a community that welcomed them in theory but derided them in practice.

Ethnographies of Queer *Cubanidad*

In the hotter than usual summer of 1994, Locas al Rescate was headed by la Señorita Tini; you could call her Mar if you knew her well. An organic intellectual if there ever was one, Mar Tini, or Dry Martini when she was not in drag, unofficially founded the SoBe group before the height of the public discourse about Hermanos al Rescate's downed aircraft.[17] Drag for la Señorita Tini consisted of more than gender mischief enacted by a person of color. It registered

how humor could disarm political forms of domination by transgressing gender systems operative within and outside of the Cuban *left* versus *right* Manichean dichotomy and whose common denominator was the maintenance of mutually sustaining gender orthodoxy. This disarming humor, evident in the group's name and performances, created practices of freedom vis-à-vis the possibility for cultural critique facilitated by drag through what José Esteban Muñoz has called the politics of *choteo*. Following Cuban philosopher Jorge Mañach's analysis of Cuban cultural identity in his *Indagación del choteo* (1928), Muñoz notes that *choteo* "signifies upon a range of activities that include tearing, talking, throwing, maligning, spying, and playing" (Muñoz 1999: 135). In addition, *choteo* can be understood as "a style of colonial mimicry that is simultaneously a form of resemblance and menace" (p. 136).[18] The practitioner of *choteo* is a *choteador* who practices a "strategy of self-enactment that helps a colonized or otherwise dispossessed subject enact a self through a critique of normative culture" (p. 136). Drag—an unlikely Trojan horse—offered both entry and a captive audience for Tini's particular brand of *choteo*, which signaled and pointed to a deadly serious *signified* (the abjectified *balsero*) mediated by a parodic and ultimately disarming *signifier* (drag). Her "rescues" were, after all, enacted in the accouterments of a feminine sublime cum *chusma de los solares de la Habana*, the class marked "trash" of the deteriorated neighborhoods of Havana.

Mar Tini left Cuba to reconquer a lost love, a lover who had left her in Cuba to be with his exiled wife in Miami. When she arrived in Miami after the Mariel boat exodus, and by way of Iowa—"una larga historia" (a long story)—Mar Tini's lover shunned her and she was intermittently homeless until she began to perform and stage "happenings." She had a beautiful voice and, like the established black SoBe drag performer of the time, Kitty Meow, she developed quite a following. On a lark, she began appearing in the SoBe club scene in the early 1990s with several "sisters" who would rile the crowd until they had everyone screaming "Locas al rescate!" The parody initiated an unwitting dialogue with a broader and more serious problematic that did not get lost in the performance. The *locas*' "rescue missions" initially consisted of catcalls ranging from "¡Ponte más ropa niño, así no vas encontrar hombre respetable!" (Put on some more clothes, boy; there's no way you're going to find a respectable man dressed like that!), to the more charming, "¡Morronga sí, Castro no!" (Yes to cock, no to Castro!). Yet it was not difficult to sense that the performance of ethnic essence interweaved with the camp *choteo* was a safe way to displace a broader problematic. Mar Tini could always point out the "Cubanitos malos"—the bad little Cubans, club bunnies who acted "como si fueran americanitos" (as if they were white) and supposedly spoke no Spanish but got every joke she said in Cuban. "Me hago la muerta para ver el entierro y ya te vi

haciéndote pasar, maricón!" (I play dead to witness the wake and I saw you trying to pass, faggot!). It was part of her shtick, public humor as a safe way to rage.

Mar Tini held court and power over the caricatures of masculinity before her: overly muscular circuit bunnies whose exoskeletons—like AIDS-era armor—were often manufactured by steroids and an intense need to feel protected, exempt from the various deaths surrounding SoBe's astounding HIV rates.[19] It was obvious that many of the bodies before her wanted to exist in a state of pure desire. They wanted to be contemplated and wanted without the appearance of reciprocation; they wanted to exist in a state of desire that holds currency in the elusive empire of signs that was the club circuit of SoBe (like many other circuit spaces). Until, of course, drugs, drink, or boredom transported the same bodies that refused human affinity in the circuit to the realm of imperfect forms, their shadows cast in the modern-day cavelike alleys of SoBe and the bucolic but dark mangroves of Flamingo Park. The bodies of those Lycra-clad *musculosos* feared la Señorita Tini because her armor was her tongue and her mind, commodities carelessly squandered when one chooses to live exclusively in the I/eye of the mirror like so many of us from my generation have done in an attempt to stave off various deaths, both literal and emotional, presaged by the specter of HIV and the concomitant lack of personal meaning in the face of such profound loss. Mar Tini was aware of the conceits of survival (denial of death included) and reminded us through performance of our own performances of life in denial of death.

Mar Tini was reputed to have had a falling out with a promoter and so she began to stage her happenings in guerrilla fashion. She would still appear at circuit parties, unbeknownst to promoters or club owners. This was the case the night she made local news after an incident during one of the Warsaw Ballroom's foam parties. (Foam parties were all the rage some years ago. From the corners of a club floor foam would literally be pumped onto the dance area, making people remove wet clothing and often disappear into the foam. All of this added to the already sexually charged environment created by the space itself, the music, and, often, recreational drugs.) In the middle of the carnivalesque atmosphere, I remember her emerging from a corner as if rising from the foam. She was dressed in a long, stiff blue cape and a neon white gown with what looked like a nun's habit, and atop her head nested a spectacular and miraculously steady crown. As people began to cede way, it was clear that everyone thought she was performing, and indeed she was, but extra-officially and for reasons made unusual only in retrospect. When she centered herself on the dance floor it was clear she had half-stilts on, she was so tall. Three shirtless rafters appeared from behind her cape and began to dance around her with plastic oars like frantic sailors. I do not know if the irony was lost on everyone else, but dressed as she was as la Caridad del Cobre it became clear that this

performance of ethnic drag was the closest many in the room would get to having a religious experience. When security arrived everyone thought they were part of the act until she fell off her stilts and onto the stage. She was duly kicked out by the bouncers, but a slew of foamed circuit aficionados followed and began to clap and whistle outside the Warsaw (a tribute usually reserved for the DJs, revered as they were—and are—as the high priests of modern circuit paganism). Suddenly, it seemed that everyone waiting in line to get in began to follow her and the rowers up Collins Ave. shouting, "Morronga sí, Castro no!" The marvelous curiosity begged a logical enough question: How could a Marielito and three rafters steal the show with the accoutrements of a *cubanidad* not quite lost on the spectators?

I remember my surprise that summer at hearing the most apolitical types at places like the ironically named News Café on Ocean Drive talk about Cuba, Hermanos al Rescate, rafters—those rescued at the circuit parties, those rescued at sea—and those who did not make the crossing. "Este es mi hijo" (This is my son), said la Señorita Tini, showing me the photograph of a son lost at sea. "No quiso esperar y nunca llegó. Su madre ahora me odia más que nunca" (He didn't want to wait and never arrived. His mother hates me now more than ever), she says as she looks up to meet my eyes, "y con razón" (and with good reason).

You wanted to ask things you had no right to ask.

The Affective Life of Locas

In my mind's eye, la Señorita Tini's club rescue mission as la Caridad del Cobre might have been nothing more than an instance of humorous and gender-bending ethnic drag, a curiosity to recall and relate from a summer of excess and reckoning more than ten years past. But, you see, my mother's name is Caridad, named after Our Lady of Charity, patroness of Cuba, and she took me to the shrine of the Virgin in the town of El Cobre when I was almost four. It was a particularly long trip from Bolondrón in the province of Matanzas to El Cobre in the province of Santiago de Cuba. It was a costly trip, one forever etched in my mind and undertaken just before my mother was sent to *la granja*, an internment camp for political dissenters who did time before their official expulsion from Cuba. It was then that I first heard about the legend of the Virgin who had appeared to three fishermen, "los tres Juanes," in the Bay of Nipe on the northeastern tip of Cuba and rescued them from a terrible storm. Historian María Elena Díaz (2000: 1) notes that "these fishermen represent the trinity of races [black, white, and mulatto] constituting the Cuban nation (excluding the usually excluded Chinese). Over the four centuries of the shrine's existence, various sectors of the population have reportedly invoked, con-

tested, and reinvented this Marian tradition. Many forms of community and social identity, both religious and secular, as well as multiple—and at times conflicting—political agendas have been, and still are, formulated through this powerful story of the past."[20] The Virgin has been variously reimagined, as Díaz notes in her study, including at the hermitage in Miami, which has become "a diasporic space [for] Cubans in exile, one often charged with strong political meanings regarding the present and the past" (p. 20).

I was dancing to a house infusion remix of the already dated Dead or Alive anthem "Something in My House" when I saw la Señorita Tini as the Virgin in the Warsaw and I thought about my mother, the trip to El Cobre, my father's long exile, and my mother's internment at *la granja*.

> *The Warsaw was not the place for addled memories or affective irony—that disturbing perception of inconsistency, in which an apparently innocuous event is undermined by its content—but the Lady of Charity was there to remind you just who you were and why you were where you were. Your mother tells you that on the trip to El Cobre you told anyone who would listen that she was going to save* "los tres juanes."

There are things about my mother's internment that I want to ask, but she says there is nothing to say. I want to know why my mother could not have children after that year and a half of internment and why, according to my paternal grandmother, Rosario Guillermo de Lima, my mother refused to speak for almost a year after the experience. As I have pieced the dates together, she became *yerma* (barren) after her internment in *la granja*, an internment which also made her mute. Yet she speaks to me with her eyes; perhaps only because I need her to, but she speaks to me. I have only a single picture of my mother from this period. It was taken soon after we arrived in Spain, somewhere between twelve and eighteen months after *la granja*. There is no communal history relating to these internment camps where my mother labored up until 1971.[21] There is no history of this for me save a photograph that speaks to me because I need it to tell me things that can help explain my own piece of a broader transnational haunting.

Reckonings: After Turning Our Backs on "Pepito Pérez"

The Lady of Charity functions as the ambulatory protector of Cubans. Whether in Cuba, Miami, at sea—or elsewhere in the emotional imaginary of the heart—she hovers and oversees as witness. Like Freud's "familiar stranger," she lingers and demands a commerce of feeling that requires her interlocutors to make their relation to her ghostly being explicit. We are complicit with her hauntings. Like the Statue of Liberty, the Virgin of Charity

is symbol, beacon, and icon. She is the appropriated Greek Themis who stands in for Cuban justice, but the Virgin—like her younger Ellis Island counterpart who also floats on water—does not don a blindfold. Justice requires vigilance, and invoking the Virgin for many Cubans is about invoking the mind's eye to redirect our focus to the evidence before us. She cannot rescue everyone because she cannot be everywhere at once, yet her sight is unmarred as the perpetual witness of *cubanía*'s transnational plight; everywhere she leaves traces of the reckoning to be undertaken. So we witness. We help her intercede—even if unwittingly—when we pause to look at the evidence of loss before us, because she will not leave until we have done our share of reckoning.

All empty *balsas* are haunted. The ghost rafts appear on beaches, in inlets, and in coves from the Florida Keys up to the Miami peninsula and beyond. They are encountered by beachcombers, cruise ships, and Coast Guard cutters and appear in meteorological photographs taken from weather boats and imaging satellites. Ghost rafts deliver a message from a host of Pepitos and Pepitas Pérez.[22] Like the material detritus of lost hope—a lost wedding ring or the frayed photograph of a beloved—these rafts tell a story of prior actions and motivations. Ghost rafts are the forensic artifacts of a failed transnational will to power. Like someone else's love letter mistakenly delivered to us, they arrive from an unidentifiable agent who tells a story of intense yearning and intentions stifled by circumstance. Since we are the unwitting addressee, we can ignore the message. After all, it is often cryptic, and the writing on the raft—the imaginary wall of Cuban (trans)national reckoning—is not always clear or legible. Besides, the living cannot possibly commune with the dead, much less with their lost objects, the things the dead carried on their journey, the raft that carried them to their fate, the monumental loss left for the grieving.

If you arrived by the port of Mariel in 1980, one of your options was to leave Cuba in a frock, as Reinaldo Arenas claims to have done in his autobiography, in the hopes of being duly dismissed as a transvestite transnational. But when you leave on a raft there are no such options and the odds are against you. That means that more rafts than people make it to south Florida shores. Most striking about ghost rafts is their unanchored referents: the identities of the dead. To codify the experience of identity for those lost at sea, which the ghost rafts so tenderly but weakly point to, requires a willingness to grant the aura of personhood to a postmortem Cuban identity. I do not mean a literal identification of a John or Jane Doe, a Pepito or Pepita Pérez, in a gesture of utopian closure (important though unrealistic as it may be), but rather an understanding of how the rites of death relate to the ongoing social life of a community. If death rites are concerned with issues relating to a community's identity, to the social continuity of that community through rememberings, then we need to understand why we have no mourning rites for ghost rafts.

What is it about the experience of Cuban transnationalism that allows us to excise a part of our body politic from our symbolic cultural imaginary? What is it about being on land and alive that allows us to send the ghost rafts' referents—the very materiality of the dead *balseros*—to an internment space whose borders and confines are rock, reef, and salt water?

The Cuban transnational is queerly *abjectified* in the holding cell of Cuban affiliation unless political affinities are articulated, performed, and enacted before a broader body politic. Cuban transnationalism is therefore exemplary to the degree that it requires a stateless citizenship to confer affiliation and procure inclusion onto the stateless body politic, the community's social imaginary. This stateless citizenship could be said to kill the *balsero* subject again after death because it requires defined allegiances to state-sanctioned modes of being, a being at home in relation to the Cuban nation—however conceived—that has no place for the dead because it presumes there can be no *cubanidad* for the stateless transnational after death. This hegemonic and stateless citizenship functions nonetheless as a state technology that disengages yearning from the political work the dead crave; it wrests yearning from rigor mortised hands and places it squarely in the land of the living as a quality of being alive. Yet the interstices of Cuban transnationalism are littered with the detritus of yearning offered to us by dead *balseros* who are in a perpetual state of being dead, a permanent homelessness. Fear of the dissolution of the Cuban state as it was understood to exist prior to 1959 has created a longing for a lived experience of *cubanidad* that cannot apprehend the postmortem forms of citizenship it has created. The yearned-for restoration of that deadly and illusory pre-1959 unity has created deaths it has yet to account for, deaths that will continue to haunt *cubanía*'s house of meaning. These deaths, enticements of various sorts to leave the island and therefore win over *la otra orilla*, were sanctioned killings in a war of wills to define the very being of *cubanidad*. There is, therefore, great political benefit in conjoining with the yearning of the dead for more complete forms of personhood. The dead talk, walk, and sit at *cubanía*'s table when we reanimate the forms of belonging that queer practices of freedom challenge us to imagine outside the orthodoxy of feeling Cuban, the *bugarronería* of sentiment to which I alluded earlier. The incorporation of abject *cubanidad* into the Cuban and Cuban American body politic, from the socially dead queer to the materially dead *balsero*, opens up fields of feelings that position the meaning of Cuban affiliation within our touch.

The survival of the dead's objects that wash ashore or are found at sea are ironic proxies for human loss, but they are the links between our being alive and their being dead, and they bind us to imagining *cubanía* anew. There is as yet no vocabulary of feeling that can explain Cuba's Sargasso Sea of ghost rafts. But unlike the thick seaweed that traps ships and people in the center of the

Gulf Stream's placid waters, the ghost rafts are delivered ashore for our contemplation, the "human latitudes"[23] of a queer and incomparable irony.

Mi hijo, lo sacrificamos todo por ti. . . .

If our parents' ultimate sacrifice for my generation of Cuban transnationals was their lives as they knew it, then our sacrifice here—alive and on land—should be the queer burden of memory: the precious dividends of a loss less tortured by an *other* haunting, a queerer sense of the abject commemorated, remembered into the transnational body politic imagined.

Imagining Closure

I began with the systematic compulsions and hauntings that drive us to *be* and to *do*, an ontology of action occasioned by transnational displacements and the condition of being alive that call us to document *cubanidad* in the academy—despite limited remuneration and sometimes incomparable sacrifices—in order to witness and recover our histories, and ourselves, as we rummage through the cultural found objects that clamor for attention, the heart of queer affiliations in the face of cultural reductionism and historical amnesia. Citing Raymond Williams, Gordon unabashedly invokes the generative tensions to be found in work that strives to be transformative, "not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity" (Gordon 1997: 198).

Socially and politically, queer Cuban rafters and Marielitos in SoBe could be said to be as dead as the rafters lost at sea were it not for their active engagement with the community writ large. When queer Cuban rafters and the Marielitos who comprised Locas bought the memory of lost rafters to the fore by keeping live rafters (those who made it to south Florida alive) literally living through safe-sex education (for both the queer identified and straight identified subjects) and in the social imaginary of the community through performances of *cubanidad*, then we can understand how freedom for Locas was an ethical and loving call to social praxis. La Señorita Tini's public evocation of refashioned and parodied Cuban identities formulated a personal engagement for me with communal memory that commemorated forms of non-belonging (processes of abjectification, if you will) that are integral to understanding Cuban transnationalism. Her performances of Cuban transnational memory inaugurated forms of cultural recovery through remembrance rather than excision, a practice of freedom through a call to social praxis. Locas al Rescate's spatial and performative takeovers amidst the foam, and in the parks and other recessed corners of desire, produced practices of freedom in spaces where endangered knowledge was unrepresentable to many: the park, the bar, the

beach, the cove, the bushes, or the bedroom, all queer spaces from which to interrogate *cubanidad*'s various hauntings in all their transnational complexity and contradictory imaginings. Queer haunting is the engagement with emotion, the affective density of lived experience, an affirmation of a complex personhood too long denied. The Locas' claiming of space denied (club space, park space, love space, seascapes), the appropriation through trespass of cordoned geographies, enacted practices of freedom through the evocation of loss with the forms of *being* that are at stake when we ignore the rafter ashore, the empty raft, the complexity of yearning across borders of the state and the heart, the complexity of estrangement and abjection that makes "queer" both a noun and a transitive verb in search of its object.

> *It could begin with the memory of a trip to El Cobre, a palimpsest suffused with your parent's memories supplanting those you believe to be your own, the grafted accounts of loss and sacrifice,* "Mi hijo, lo sacrificamos todo por ti," *the mantra you woke up to so many times in graduate school after your father died, the one you hear every time you recall your mother's face when she saw you kissing that boy in Hialeah when you thought no one was looking. You were old enough then to remember her eyes watery, her lips pursed with incomprehension. It is a memory that belies Caridad's own logic of self-sacrifice through exile, the very justification that provided the emotional fuel for staving off displacement, divorce, your father's death, illness, and more. It is an image you also believe prompted her slow retreat into memory, you and that one boy you loved at sixteen, the haze of nostalgia and loss clouding her features until she is no longer a young woman and you are no longer that semblance of the self she used to know. You, her only child.*

The queer burden of refashioning Cuba's transnational memories is a grave but necessary act of personal reckoning.

Notes

A version of this chapter was presented at Florida International University's Fifth Cuban Research Institute Conference on Cuban and Cuban American Studies (October 29–31, 2003) in the panel "Trans-Disciplinary Dislocations, Trans-Cultural Studies: Re-Situating Cuban American Studies in the Contemporary U.S. Academy." The panel members were Ricardo Ortiz, who organized and moderated the session, José Esteban Muñoz, Licia Fiol-Matta, and myself. I would like to thank my fellow presenters, especially Ricardo, and the audience members who provided wonderful insight into our respective projects. My special thanks to Ruth Behar for her insightful comments on my talk. Damián Fernández encouraged me to develop the presentation into its present incarnation; I thank him for his careful reading and thoughtful suggestions. My colleague Azade

Seyhan's thoughtful comments were instructive, as were the anonymous readers' comments.

1. My use of the term "queer" is necessarily limiting as I focus on very specific interpolations of queer identities; specifically, Cuban American drag performers in South Beach and my own engagement within this community as both witness and participant. With this caveat in mind I would, nonetheless, like to follow Alexander Doty's suggestive and critically strategic use of the term "queer" "to mark a flexible space for the expression of all aspects of non- (anti-, contra-) straight cultural production and reception" (Doty 1993: 3). It is also important to note the significant contributions of critics working on Latin American, Latina, and Latino queer studies, especially Emilio Bejel, Licia Fiol-Matta, José Esteban Muñoz, José Quiroga, Juana Rodríguez, and many others. With regard to "transnationalism," I proffer the anthropological definition offered by Linda Basch and colleagues "as the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multistranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement. We call these processes transnationalism to emphasize that many immigrants today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders" (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994: 7). The translations that follow throughout the chapter are my own.

2. In referring to his work in *The Care of the Self*, Michel Foucault summarized the ethical cornerstone of his critique of normative forms of sexual subjection and the instrumentality of power by rhetorically positioning an answer within a question: "For what is morality, if not the practice of liberty, the deliberate practice of freedom? . . . Liberty is the ontological condition of ethics. But ethics is the deliberate form assumed by liberty" (cited in Bernauer and Rasmussen 1994: 4). Foucault's "practice of freedom" as the principled ethic of the care of the self cum others was appropriated by Simon Watney in his important collection of essays, *Practices of Freedom: Selected Writings on HIV/AIDS* (1994). For a discussion of practices of freedom as an "ethic of the care of the self" in relation to Latino performance studies see Muñoz (1999); for an example in Latino poetry see Lima (2001).

3. Marielitos are Cubans who left the island in the port of Mariel boat exodus of 1980. After Cubans seeking political asylum stormed the Peruvian Embassy in Havana, Castro purportedly purged his jails and allowed prisoners to leave the country as political dissidents. For a discussion of *balseros* as an orientalized commodity, see León (1997).

4. In one of the few sustained critiques of the Cuban diaspora, de la Nuez (1998) considers the *balsa*, or raft, the foundational metaphor for *cubanidad* (Cubanness) as experienced in exile and on the island.

5. For an exemplary exception see Fernández (2000).

6. See Clifford (1992); Gupta and Ferguson (1992).

7. Aside from the literal translation I have provided, "Mi hijo" is a term employed not just by parents but by elders to signify affection toward an addressee who is implored to understand the interpolated main clause or phrase. A less literal but more accurate translation would read, "Son, please understand that. . . ."

8. As of 1994, the United States has had a "wet foot–dry foot" policy. Cubans who make it to shore (with dry feet) are permitted to apply for asylum, while those inter-

dicted (with wet feet) are returned to Cuba. In a curious interpretation of policy in the summer of 1999, the Coast Guard was captured on camera using pepper spray and force to keep Cuban rafters from drying their feet.

9. Gordon wishes to expand what she sees as an important though unfinished assertion about affective engagement with the past in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*: "Despairing at the loss of historical perspective, at our 'disturbed relationship with the dead—forgotten and embalmed,' they [Horkheimer and Adorno] believed we needed some kind of theory of ghosts, or at least a way of both mourning modernity's 'wound in civilization' and eliminating the destructive forces that open it up over and over again: 'Only the conscious horror of destruction creates the correct relationship with the dead: unity with them because we, like them, are the victims of the same condition and the same disappointed hope'" (Gordon 1997: 19–20).

10. Not surprisingly, it was during this period (1993) that Miami Cuban American Pedro Zamora became a household name. Appearing on the MTV reality series "The Real World," Zamora brought to the living rooms of millions the real life of a Cuban American from Miami who was living with AIDS. José Esteban Muñoz notes that upon Zamora's death in 1994 the *Wall Street Journal* ran a cover story featuring a letter that a South Carolina woman wrote Zamora, one among the "thousands he received per week." In it she explained how she was transformed: "I never thought anyone could change my opinion of homosexuals and AIDS. Because of you I saw the human side of something that once seemed so unreal to me" (Muñoz 1999: 143). Zamora also appeared on many news programs and talk shows, including "Oprah." President Bill Clinton also lauded Zamora's bravery in speaking out about AIDS prevention and self-esteem.

11. For Benigno Sánchez-Eppler, Reinaldo Arenas is an exemplar of this queer sexual and political transnationalism for he "provide[s] a very pointed example of how sexuality makes people move and how moving affects the practices of the representation of sexuality and the investment in some sort of return" (Sánchez-Eppler 2000: 154). Arenas' cultural, political, and highly personal work was made iconic through print and film in a transnational network of images. Though he was only able to die once, Arenas will likely live and die many times over in Julian Schnabel's version of his life in *Before Night Falls* (2000). Indeed, his iconic status via celluloid will likely safeguard his longevity, his many afterlives, long after the death of the political regime he censured with profound vitriol. He would likely appreciate the irony of living as a character in the perpetual *medias res* of *cubanidad*. This longevity is small consolation, though, since Arenas found neither what he would consider political nor sexual freedom in the United States, as he so acerbically noted in his autobiography.

12. *Gusanos* (worms) is the derisive term used in Cuba to describe defectors and political dissidents.

13. *Bugarrón* is a curious term from the Cuban sexual vernacular that refers to the active partner in homosexual anal sex. The active partner is understood to be heterosexual not by virtue of his sexual object choice, but rather by virtue of his dominant intrusion and "taking" of the body of another male. Only the penetrated male is labeled *loca*. Within this cultural imaginary the *bugarrón* is able to maintain his (hetero)sexual

subject integrity. In the Mexican context, as described by the late Nobel Prize winning Octavio Paz, the space and sociocultural position of that which is feminized is a priori "screwed."

14. Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé's brilliant reading of Puerto Rican literature as a failed Bildungsroman leads him to conclude that "Puerto Rican canonical texts have not ruled through potency but through impotence. . . . Puerto Rican canonical texts have rallied us and bound us through failure and impotence" (Cruz-Malavé 1995: 140). In referring to René Marquéz's story "En la popa hay un cuerpo reclinado," he notes that this impotence in literature creates an "abject" subjectivity that is incapable of sustaining the hierarchies of heteronormative paternalism. I am similarly interested in invoking an "abject" *cubanidad* that is discarded from the fictions of national identity on and off of the island. Unlike Cruz-Malavé, however, in this chapter I am interested in understanding how *cubanidad* is wrested from the hegemonic center and deployed in subversive practices of freedom.

15. De la Nuez sees this quite differently. He notes, "Si los chicanos reivindican su reconquista del Oeste americano con argumento de que en esa región se encontraba la mítica Aztlán, en Miami no ocurre nada parecido: no se busca, por allí, reconquistar el espacio sino un tiempo: el de la Eterna Juventud, ya perseguido en Florida por Ponce de León hace unos quinientos años" (If Chicanos vindicated their reconquest of the American West with the argument that in that region resided the mythical Aztlán, in Miami nothing of the sort occurs: the search there is about not the reconquest of space but of time: the search for eternal youth, pursued over five hundred years by Ponce de León; de la Nuez 1998: 138). Yet there was never an actual fixed geographic location for Aztlán (despite some novel anthropological suggestions to the contrary). Foremost, Aztlán resided in the collective imagination of a people in search of a collective space from which to be as economically and humanly free as possible. Miami, similarly, was imagined as the metaphorical place where the pursuit of sexual freedom could be as attainable as the more common pursuit of economic freedom.

16. For an important collection of essays that address various modalities and expressions of Cuban identitarian strategies see Cámara Betancourt and Fernández 2000.

17. The antecedents related to Hermanos al Rescate were related to Cuba's Special Period. What was left of the Cuban economy bottomed out and *balseros*—those who survived the treacherous waters—began to arrive on U.S. soil, all ostensibly to seek political asylum. The problem intensified when Haitian rafters who did the same were denied entry. This prompted the Clinton administration to sign an immigration accord with Cuba, and beginning in 1995 Cubans were no longer allowed what were understood to be special privileges. In 1996 Cuban authorities claimed that Hermanos al Rescate had violated Cuban airspace by going beyond the twenty-fourth parallel, prompting the downing of two of Hermanos' small planes by the Cuban Air Force. The incident received international attention. In another important aside, the documentary *Estado del tiempo* (1994) charting the *balsero* experience received considerable criticism for not making a clear distinction between political and economic exile. This fact was not lost on community activists who dealt with these populations on a day-to-day basis. Indeed, sexual migration—leaving to love—does not appear in the film or in most

of the social science literature relating to *balseros* because the default identity is usually that of the heterosexual political defector.

18. For the African etymological roots of *choteo* see Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz's *Glosario de afronegrismos* (1924). He associates the term with Lucumí or Yoruba etymology (cited in Muñoz 1999: 135). Muñoz expands upon Mañach's understanding of it for strategic purposes. Mañach was primarily concerned with resemantizing the term in order to cast it in a developmental narrative of national progress toward a more refined cultural maturity, that is, a Cuban modernity: "A medida que nos hacemos más ricos y más refinados . . . acrecentamos nuestro sentido de la jerarquía y disminuimos, por consiguiente, las condiciones de la vida del choteo" (As we become richer and more refined . . . we increase our sense of hierarchies and consequently diminish the conditions of life as *choteo*; Mañach 1928: 91). We can better understand Mañach if we recall that he was a positivist disciple of Spanish essayist and philosopher José Ortega y Gassett. Similarly, Ortega was a disciple of Husserl, as was his colleague Martin Heidegger. Ortega brought phenomenology to the Spanish-speaking world with translations of his German "maestros" in Spain's *Revista de Occidente*, making the Hispanic world one of the first to sample Husserl's and later Heidegger's writings.

19. In May 1995, the queer publication *Out* featured a story by Miami-based freelance writer Glenn Albin, "To Live and Die in South Beach." The piece noted that HIV-positive men in their thirties and beyond were moving to Miami to "retire," creating a new type of viral retiree. Though women and people of color were conspicuously absent from the piece, its disco graveyard theme permeated the talk of the beach and created a heightened sense of sex-negativity.

20. Díaz's study, though meticulously historical, is explicitly and intimately tied to personal history and memory: "My interest in Cuba laid dormant for many years and then was triggered with force in 1980. It happened during my return trip as an adult after twenty years of absence from the mythical country I had left as a small child. Thereafter the imagined ties were gradually rewoven in absentia. Ultimately the desire to take a more active part in the island's history materialized in the gesture of writing a slice of its history from afar" (Díaz 2000: xi).

21. The infamous Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción (Military Units to Help Production), forced work camps for dissenters of all stripes, were suspended in 1967, but similar internment camps still exist. Curiously, the word "concentration" used in the context of forcible internment (that is, "concentration camp") was first used during the final Cuban war of independence (1895–1898) by Spanish military governor Valeriano Weyler, known as "The Butcher" (Ferrer 1999: 152). Weyler's policy of *reconcentración* (to "reconcentrate" through displacement) resulted in the mass internment of rural populations in the suburban areas of large cities in an attempt to quell the Cuban independence movement.

22. "Pepito Pérez" was a fictional character fabricated by the U.S.-supported exiled Cuban right to convince Cubans on the island that they should leave. This was accomplished through various information outlets, mostly radio, where a fictional Pepito Pérez was interviewed, saying how only a few days after arriving in the United States, he was already working in a fictional company and making several thousand dollars a

month. The Pepito Pérez myth has had many incarnations and has traveled the airwaves far enough into the Cuban popular imaginary to serve purposes in both the public and private spheres. As a child, I remember being told that a roomful of toys was waiting for me upon my arrival in the United States, but only if I behaved. That promise was the junior version of the Pepito Pérez myth and—like most forms of control or coercion—kept children yearning in affective abeyance much like the adults who were seduced by the mythic lure of the Pepito Pérez fiction.

23. Early Spanish explorers often reported finding themselves in stagnant water for weeks in the Sargasso Sea, popularly known as the Bermuda Triangle (the body of water roughly bordered by the triangulation between Puerto Rico, Bermuda, and Florida). To save drinking water and free their ships from the thick sargassum, they were forced to throw their horses overboard. Hence, the area is known as the horse latitudes.

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